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FORTEAN TIMES

THE JOURNAL OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

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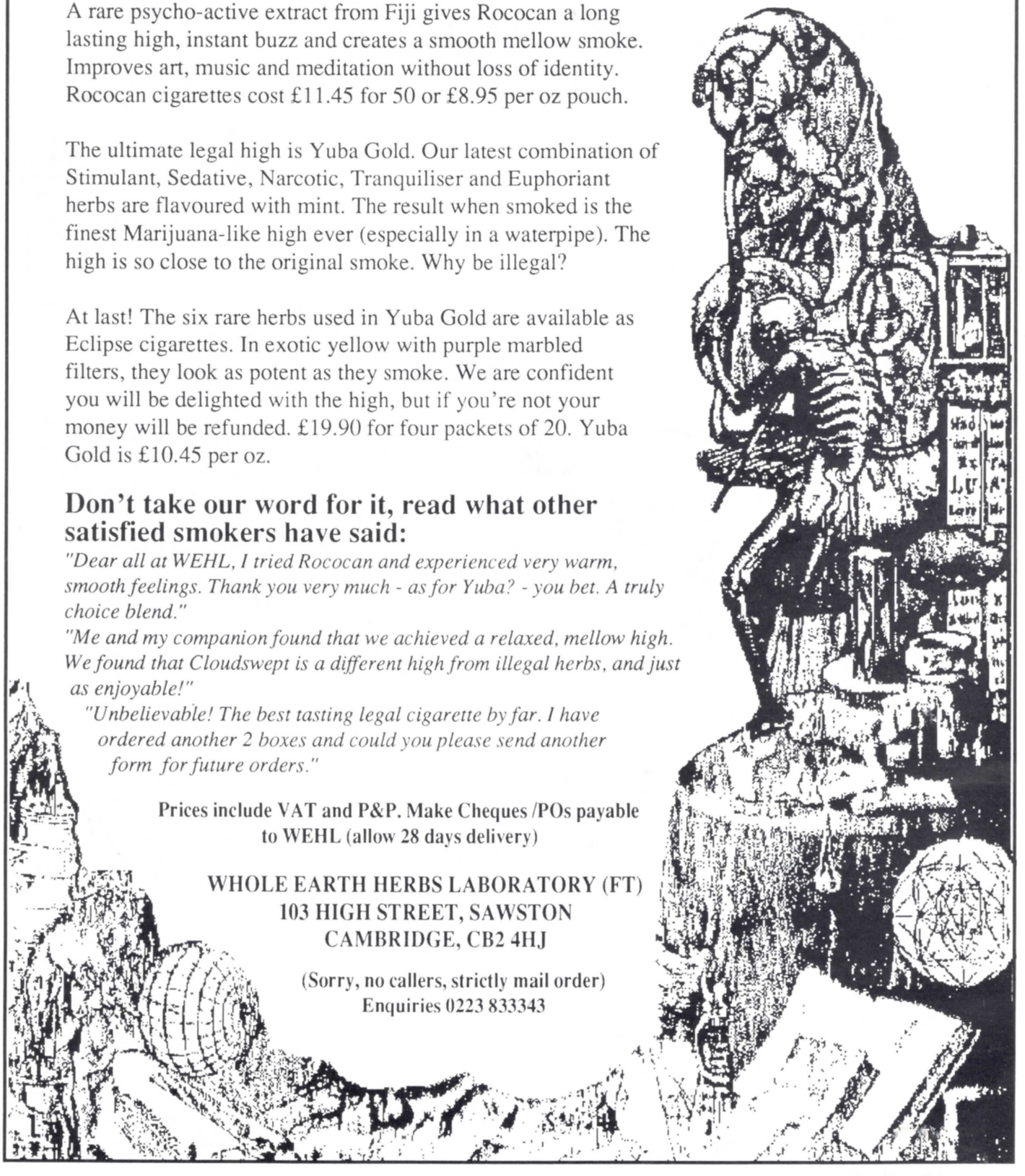

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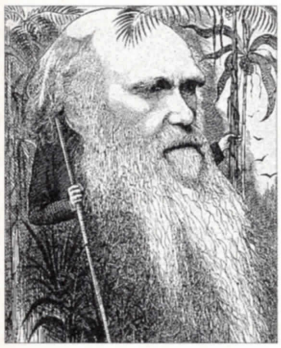

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WHY 'FORTEAN'?

CHARLES FORT (1874-1932)

Fortean Times is a bi-monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on all manner of strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents, formed in 1973 to continue the work of the iconoclastic philosopher CHARLES FORT. Fort was sceptical about scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued for and against various theories and phenomena according to their own beliefs, rather than the rules of evidence. He was appalled that data not fitting the collective paradigm was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away (which is quite different from explaining a thing).

Fort was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. He coined the term 'teleportation' which has passed into general usage through science fiction. His dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses his philosophy of Continuity and the 'doctrine of the hyphen', in which everything is in an intermediate state between extremes. He had notions of the universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena. Far from being an over-credulous man, Fort cut at the very roots of credulity: "I cannot accept that the products of minds are subject matter for beliefs ... I conceive of nothing, in religion, science, or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was born in Albany, New York, in 1874 into a family of Dutch immigrants. Beatings by a tyrannical father helped set him against authority and dogma, and on leaving home at the age of 18 he hitch-hiked around the world to put some "capital into the bank of experience." At 22 he contracted malaria, married his nurse and settled down to 20 years of impoverished journalism in the Bronx. During this time he read extensively in the literature of science, taking notes on small squares of paper in a cramped shorthand of his own invention, which he filed in shoe boxes.

In 1916, when he was 42, Fort came into a modest inheritance, just enough to relieve him of the necessity of having to earn a living. He started writing *The Book of the Damned*, which his friend, the novelist Theodore Dreiser, bullied his own publisher into printing in 1919. Fort fell into a depression, burnt all his notes (which numbered some 40,000) as he had done a few years earlier, and in 1921 set sail for London, where he spent eight years living near the British Museum (39 Marchmont Street) and wrote *New Lands* (1923). Returning to New York, he published *Lo!* in 1931 and *Wild Talents* in 1932, shortly before he died. He left 60,000 notes, now in the New York Public Library.

THE GANG OF FORT:
Editors:
Bob Rickard
& Paul Sieveking

Contributing Editors:
Steve Moore
& Mike Dash

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Bob Rickard

EDITORIAL: Heaven can wait

Paul Sieveking

Thousands of Korean Christians waited for the Rapture at 3pm on 28 October (midnight, Korean time). When they realised the moment of bodily ascent into Heaven had passed, they had to drift off instead to the homes and jobs so many of them had given up for the promise of eternal life. In the city of Taegu, a disappointed congregation beat up their pastor, and elsewhere a sceptical theologian who scoffed too loudly was stabbed; otherwise, said Korean police, the wave of expected suicides didn't happen. For more details see page 7.

● This issue (page 24), we feature an article by Richard Milton, who casts doubt on the rock-dating methods used to calculate the age of our planet. Perhaps Earth is much younger than Darwinists require for their epic of natural selection to be played out. Mr Milton has generated quite a bit of heat – not to say abuse – in the scientific press just recently with his book *The Facts of Life*.

● As 1992 is the tricentenary of the death of Elias Ashmole, founder of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, we asked museum curator Ian Simmons to describe the 'cabinet of curiosities' assembled by John Tradescant that formed the basis of this famous collection. His article appears on page 32.

● As we go to press, we have learned of the suicide of a boy who was frightened out of his wits by the BBC TV programme *Ghostwatch*, screened on All Hallows' Eve a few weeks ago. The show was a dramatisation of a fictional investigation of a violent poltergeist haunting featuring a live broadcast, a phone-in, and a studio chat with 'expert' researchers – all fake except for the celebrity presenters who were well-known from children's or light entertainment shows.

Ghostwatch lurched uneasily between seeming fact and realistic fiction, finally going over the top as the polt burst into the studio and possessed Michael Parkinson. Many angry viewers complained afterwards that they were seriously disturbed by the programme's overt demonstration of the objective existence of malevolent discarnate entities. Others felt disgust at being cruelly tricked by celebrities they trusted implicitly to tell them the truth about a fascinating subject. The screening of *Ghostwatch* raises issues which deserve to be discussed more fully than we can do in this short notice, and this will be done next issue.

● A timely reminder that the **Fortean Times 1993 Diary** is a goldmine of entertaining information, running to 50,000 words, and makes an excellent Christmas present. Here's an example: 15 December is the birthday of the Emperor Nero, Eiffel (of the Tower), Dr Ludwig Zamenhof (inventor of Esperanto), and Edna O'Brien. On this day in 1980, members of the Truth Tabernacle Church in Burlington, North Carolina, staged a mock trial, charging 'Satan Claus' on ten counts, including child abuse, impersonation of St Nicholas, Baal idolatry and falsification of Christ's birthday. Claus was found guilty and hanged in effigy, as a gaggle of giggling children looked on.

See page 23 for ordering details.

THE EDITORS

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STRANGE DAYS

16 pages of worldwide weirdness

MOCKINGBIRD OFFENSIVE

Helen Morel, a student from Washington DC, ducks in surprise as she is attacked by one of two mockingbirds nesting nearby in Dupont Circle, a few blocks from the White House, in June 1992. The birds were expected to keep up the attacks until the nestlings were ready to fly after a few weeks.

VIETNAM'S LOST WORLD

John MacKinnon holding the horns of the unknown mammal from the Vu Quang Nature Reserve in Vietnam

The remote and roadless Vu Quang nature reserve in Vietnam is 65 square miles along a steep stretch of land near the Laotian border, a rugged trek from the central town of Vinh and 10 hours' drive from Hanoi. (One source, the *Bangkok Post*, maintains that Vu Quang spreads over 65,168 square kilometres: this is quite a discrepancy!) Left untouched by half a century of war and expanding civilization, the reserve was originally set aside and protected as a cultural area because it provided refuge for a local hero who had rebelled against the French.

Field Trip

A team of scientists from the Vietnamese government and the London-based World Wildlife Fund (known in Europe as the Worldwide Fund for Nature), under the direction of senior conservationist John McKinnon, 45, visited the reserve on a three-week field trip last May. Zoologists had never visited the area before.

Fresh Maggots

The team spotted two previously unknown bird species, at least one new fish and an unknown tortoise with a striking yellow shell. They also observed 62 fish species, 20 species of amphibian and 37 reptile species. Most exciting of all, however, was the discovery of three upper skulls and horns of an antelope-like animal - one with fresh maggots still inside it - in hunters' houses. The hunters have been asked to look out for a live specimen, and Dr McKinnon is working on a camera trap to photograph the elusive creature. An inch-square specimen of skin was sent to US cancer research scientists for DNA analysis.

"We still don't know exactly what the mammal is", said Dr McKinnon. "The local people call it a forest goat, but goats' horns are usually ribbed or bent back and spiralled. These stick right up out of the skull and are straight and dagger-like, a bit like the African oryx." The oryx is known to have inhabited what is now Pakistan in a previous age. Dr McKinnon said the animal, which can have black or brown hide, appeared to be about the size of an English fallow deer with 18-inch horns, deadly enough to fend off tigers.

Skin Samples

"We hope the DNA testing of hair and skin samples in the United States will tell us where it falls in the bovid family. The whole team is very excited as discovery of new large mammals is very rare, I think about five this century."

The new species could turn out to be related to the anoa, a primitive dwarf buffalo found only in Indonesia; or the tamarau of the Philippines. As a result of the discoveries, the Vietnamese government have promised to halt the building of a timber mill and extend the nature reserve. The World Wildlife Fund is also pushing for Laos to establish a reserve in its adjacent Khammonn province to give further protection to the lush habitat. *[AP], Evening Standard, 17 July + 17 Aug; D.Telegraph, 17 July; AP, 28 July; Bangkok Post, 29 July; Wellington (NZ) Evening Post, 19 Aug 1992.*

DOUGH FROM ABOVE

On St Patrick's Day (17 March 1992), 20 pounds of white-bread dough fell from the sky and crashed through the roof of Doug and Paula Ward of Bellingham, Washington, with what was described as "a horrendous crash, like a sonic boom".

"An astronomer took a sample", Paula Ward told columnist Dave Barry, "and he said it was just regular bread dough. The religious people think it was a sign from God, because you know, in the Bible, God dropped manna. But it doesn't look like religious dough to me. We still have it, and it hasn't risen yet. It's looking kind of slimy." *Monday Magazine (Victoria, British Columbia) 18 June 1992.*

HARD TO SWALLOW

As thousands of tourists made their annual pilgrimage to the ancient mission at San Juan Capistrano in California, they scanned the skies in vain. The swallows are no longer returning to Capistrano. As he has done in many previous years, 96-year-old Paul Arbiso rang the mission bells at 8:02am on 19 March, to signal their return, but ornithologist Margaret Rubega, in attendance, saw only a white-throated swift and a hummingbird.

The annual return of migrating swallows has been celebrated in phrase, song and literature, but the birds are having none of it. Development around the mission has displaced their usual supply of insects and the birds are now dining out in other areas, such as the marshland at Irvine to the north. *Daily News (CA), 20 March 1992.*

SUMMER SPORTS OF NATURE

● Michael Leonetti, 11, of Des Moines, Iowa, holds a seven-legged frog (shown below) which he found while fishing for tadpoles in Des Moines Water Works Park. The Science Center of Iowa was interested in displaying the frog. It was thought that one of the frog's legs was cut as it grew, and each part of the leg that was cut developed its own leg. *[AP] 25 July 1992.*

● A four-clawed two-pound female lobster (see picture below) was on display at a Waterville, Maine, store on 21 July. It was caught in Penobscot Bay and was to be given to the Maine Aquarium at the end of the summer. *[AP] 22 July 1992.*

DOOMSDAY DELAYED

● The million or so Koreans who followed Pastor Lee Jang Lim of the Tami Missionary Church and similar eschatological outfits were disappointed in their expectation that the Rapture (taking up to heaven) would happen on 28 October [see ***FT65:7***]. Doomsday arrived a month early for Pastor Lee, who was arrested at the end of September. Police discovered that he had received over two million pounds in donations from his flock and was converting some of this, illegally, into US dollars. Most incriminating of all was the discovery of £230,000 in bonds that were due to mature in 1995, three years into the Great Tribulation, when money was supposed to be worthless. *[AP] 24 Sept; Independent, 30 Sept 1992.*

● Not all believers agreed on the exact date of the Rapture. One burnt himself to death on 5 October, a day before his chosen day for the Second Coming. It was the fourth known doomsday-related suicide this year. Another 500 devotees of the Davera Mission Church, led by Ha Bang-ik, spent several hours in prayer on the night of 9/10 October in a south Seoul chapel. The 200 riot police outside didn't intervene. Ostensibly, there were there to prevent suicides. *[AP] 11 Oct 1992.*

● Jesus was due to appear in the air above Australia on 29 October, according to the Mission for the Coming Days, headed by Korean-born pastor Chang Hun Jo in Sydney and affiliated to the Tami Missionary Church. Adherents throughout Australia readied themselves for the ascent to heaven, leaving the rest of us to face the Anti-Christ and seven years of 'Horrible Great Tribulation'. *Wellington (NZ) Evening Post, 22 Aug; Brisbane (Aust.) Sunday Mail, 6 Sept 1992.*

● Meanwhile, across Sydney Harbour, Adam Newman, 58, sits waiting for The End. Some 28 years ago, he said, the spirit told him to build an ark before the great rains. He has been building ever since and now he has four. He attracted little attention until recently, when he took on local government over the conversion of his 12-roomed house into a 'mother ark'.

He is not quite sure when The End will be, but he regards as portentous the recent arrival on his doorstep of a rat, and the refusal of cats and pigeons to leave his 'mother ark'. The house still stands firmly on its foundations, but he has sealed the floorboards, built a wheelhouse and stored hundreds of pieces of foam for buoyancy. The other three arks float nearby. *[Reuters] 17 Sept 1992.*

BEWARE SWIFT TUTTLE

● Comet Swift-Tuttle, which produces Earth's spectacular Perseid shower every August, has been spotted for the first time since 1862, said American astronomers on 29 September. Brian Marsden, director of the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams, predicted in 1973 that the comet might show up late this year if it failed to appear between 1979 and 1983. The comet will be visible to the naked eye in December.

Swift-Tuttle is due to make its next close approach in about 2126, when, for the first time, it will come close enough to hit us. The odds on this happening have been quoted as one in 400. The explosion caused by impact with the six-mile-wide comet travelling at around 130,000mph would be about 1,000 million times greater than the Hiroshima bomb. All the buildings in the world would fall down and everybody would be killed, except perhaps a few living in caves. A huge dust cloud would produce a temporary ice age. In short, much the same scenario as the alleged meteoric collision 65 million years ago, when the dinosaurs were wiped out. *Hackensack (NJ) Record, 30 Sept; D.Telegraph, 23 Oct 1992.*

BLASPHEMOUS SHOES AND TYRES

There has been footwear trouble with Muslims for years. In 1985, thousands of Chinese shoes were seized in Egypt because the anti-slip treads reversed out as the Arabic for Allah. British and French bootmakers had similar troubles. In 1989, at least 50 people were injured (and possibly two killed) in Bangladesh riots over rubber slippers bearing a motif resembling the Arabic for Allah.

In April 1992, the strife erupted in the British Midlands, which played host to the holy eggplants (bearing the name of Allah) back in 1990 (see ***FT55:4***). A Nottingham fashion shop was selling dressy Italian gold shoes (£69.99 a pair) decorated with an Arabic verse from the First Pillar of Islam: "There is no God but Allah".

Haji Mohammed Asmat, vice-chairman of the Nottingham Islamic Centre, wanted the owner of the three Valentina shops selling the shoes, in Nottingham, Leicester and Peterborough, to withdraw the offending shoes and apologise to the Muslim community. "It is more serious than Salman Rushdie", he insisted. "Rushdie wrote a book which you carry in your hand. Here, the holy name goes on the feet."

Italian-born owner of the shops, Mrs Diana Lewis, at first refused to withdraw the shoes, but reached an amicable agreement with Muslim representatives on Friday, 17 April. A wealthy Muslim bought the last 12 pairs in the Nottingham shop and burned them. In the small hours of the following Monday, however, a Toyota estate car was driven into the window of the Leicester Valentina shop and set alight, destroying the entire stock of shoes. It was not known who was responsible. *Nottingham Eve. Post, Leicester Mercury, 17 April; Guardian, 17+21 April 1992.*

Diana Lewis with one of the offending shoes.

The wreckage of Diana Lewis' shop in Leicester.

JEEP PROTEST

In July, the Tokyo-based Yokohama Rubber Company recalled tyres fitted on Mitsubishi jeeps after being bombarded with protests by Muslims in Brunei and Saudi Arabia who claimed that the tyre's tread pattern resembled the Arabic for Allah. Spokesman Akira Mikami said the company had stopped producing the tyres and was replacing them with new ones free of charge in Islamic countries. The company also ran an apology in the 13 May edition of a magazine published by the Japan Islam Association. Yokohama recalled 300 tyres from Brunei and cancelled orders for a further 380.

The treads were designed by computer to maximise driving safety, not to upset Muslims. An unidentified gunman fired three shots on 20 July at the entrance of a house owned by Hisaaki Suzuki, chairman of Yokohama Rubber. Japanese police were investigating whether there was any connection with the tyre controversy. *[Reuters, AP] 24 July; Guardian, 25 July; The Daily Yomiuri [Japan], Aug 1992.*

HOLY FOREARM

Islamic simulacra in nature are quite a different matter and are widely welcomed by the faithful. A baby born bearing the name 'Mohammed' twice on her left forearm has become a celebrity in the Muslim desert nation of Chad. The girl was born on 3 or 4 October. Ironically, her parents, Josephine Mormale and Thomas Ndoubade, are Christians. The mother said she hadn't noticed the writing at first, thinking it was only a scar. *Edinburgh Evening News, 5 Oct 1992.*

CROSSED SOLES

In May, a court in Athens banned the sale of shoes with crosses on their soles, saying they insulted both religion and the state because the cross were similar to those used by the Greek Orthodox Church and on the Greek flag. The magistrate, Theodora Goini, upheld a petition by the Holy Union of Greek Clerics, which said several shoe companies had copied crosses found on the soles of shoes made by Timberland, an American company. The ban was lifted on 15 July. *[AP] 15 May; [AFP] 16 July 1992.*

FAMILY FIRM

Japan Efficiency Corporation, started by Satsuki Oiwa five years ago, rents families by the hour or day to those who live alone, offers shopping companions to housewives, sympathetic ears to stressed-out executives, even people to scold for those who are dying to tell someone off, but can't in Japan's culture of restraint. Employees are ranked from seventh to first class, depending on acting ability. Customers have to be wealthy: the service costs up to £300 an hour. There can be problems: the police were called when Mr and Mrs Tancha from Okinawa, both over 80, began to abuse and beat three rented 'grandchildren' for their disrespectful behaviour. *Toronto Globe & Mail, 2 April; Int. Herald Tribune, 15 May; Awake, June 1992.*

RENT-A-READ

Bibliophiles in Ulm, Germany, who wish to give their personal libraries that enviable 'read' look can hire a professional 'reader', who will turn down corners, leave theatre and cinema tickets as bookmarks, make marginal notations and underline significant passages. Price according to quantity and *Behandlungsintensität*, a useful word meaning roughly "degree of intensity of handling". *Guardian, 8 Aug 1992.*

ELK DROPPINGS

Horst Kühne, a German-born tourist official in northern Sweden, has a roaring trade in elk droppings gathered from the forest floor in Harjedalen province, which he packs in empty jam jars and sells for 35 kronor (£3.50) a go. "To be able to show your friends a dropping from an elk in a glass jar is exotic", he said. Having sold at least 1,000 jars this year, mostly to Germans, he is now branching out into reindeer droppings. *[AP] 21 Aug 1992.*

GOAT SPEAKS OUT

According to Ugandan state radio, a goat has proclaimed that the AIDS epidemic sweeping Uganda is a divine punishment for disobeying the Ten Commandments. The goat spoke in a "loud, terrifying voice" to the villagers of Kyabagala, in Mukono district, but died a few hours later. It also predicted that Uganda was on the verge of a great famine. *[AFP] 3 June 1992.*

Animal prophets are not new in Uganda. Back in August 1978, there was a report of a tortoise padding around the countryside prophesying trouble for Idi Amin Dada, the colourful lunatic and cannibal who oppressed the country at that time. 'Big Daddy' threatened to execute anyone trading in such rumours. [see ***FT27:39.***]

SHEEP AMBUSH

A couple were invited to buy an inflatable sheep sex-aid after answering an advert for rechargeable batteries in *The Daily Telegraph*. They received a personally addressed mail shot headed 'Luv Ewe' and quoting a price of £17.95. A drawing was accompanied by a description: "She has been developed after years of research into how to bring the joy of sheep into your love-life without the obvious problems of a real sheep. No bleating to alert neighbours. No risk of ruining your prize lawn."

The couple were not amused, complained to the Advertising Standards Authority, who upheld the complaint against VIS of Bethnal Green. They were unable to contact the firm. *D.Telegraph, Guardian, 13 May 1992.*

SIMULACRA CORNER

This tree trunk man sporting a Kaiser moustache was taken by Paul Greenwood. We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images.

Send your snaps to the editorial address – with SAE – and we'll pay a fiver for any we use.

Sidelines

For his 20th daredevil world record, Inge Vidar Svingen from Norway slid, shirtless, down a 500 yard ski slope on a bed of six inch nails. "I am no masochist", he told the *Dagbladet* newspaper. "Abroad, I am treated like a big entertainer. Here, I'm seen as a half-wit." *Guardian, 5 April 1991.*

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"Zucchini and eggplants are both stuffed with rice", said an Egyptian fundamentalist leader recently, "and the stuffing process, which is usually done by women, leads to arousal. It is better to prohibit the sale of these vegetables to avoid a greater danger." *Newsweek, 27 June 1992.*

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A doctor has told Kenyans who wash their genitals with battery acid after sex as a preventative to AIDS that the end result could be "even more disastrous". *[AFP] 7 Oct 1992.*

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"When we think how much mischief has been caused by the unsupported evidence of children to credulous labourers in the ritual abuse vineyard [..] we must accept that social workers, who are not trained to disbelieve anyone, are possibly the worst people to deal with the problem. Much less damage is caused by untrue stories in newspapers, which few believe in any case."

Auberon Waugh's 'Way of the World', *Daily Telegraph* 24 June 1992; prompted by a girl who fooled a newspaper into believing she fled in tears from a science class when her teacher, she alleged, ordered her to strangle a chicken.

STRANGE DEATHS

TRIGGER HAPPY

† A man from Grahamstown, South Africa, asked the police to guard his house while he was out of town, saying he would be back on 12 January 1992. The police became suspicious on the night of 30 December 1991 when lights in the supposedly empty house went on and off. An officer went to the back of the house and opened fire when a door suddenly opened, killing the homeowner, who had returned early. *[AP] 2 Jan 1992.*

A DATE WITH DESTINY

† Lee Hsi–lung and Lai Yun–kun were both born in Taitung, Taiwan, on 25 June 1973. They had not met until they went to a party arranged by mutual friends. They didn't have much time to get acquainted, as the car they were in smashed into a truck and they were killed, close to where they were born 19 years earlier. *Edinburgh Evening News, 17 Jan 1992.*

LAST CALL

† Wise–cracking bingo caller Michàel Cave, 65, collapsed and died 15 minutes into his routine at the Gala Bingo Club in London Street, Reading, Berks. The last number he called was "Number Eight … Pearly Gates." *D.Express, 18 June 1992.*

LIGHTNING IRONY

† Dr Wuyi Pan, 42, an assistant professor of materials engineering at New Mexico Tech in Socorro, was struck dead by lightning on 12 August 1992. Pan was married to Lin Zhang, a chemist who worked at the Tech's lightning research lab in the Magdalena Mountains 30 miles west of Socorro. New Mexico has the highest rate of lightning deaths per capita in the United States. *[AP] 13 Aug 1992.*

GARDEN HAZARD

† Philip Hodges, 34, was cutting a yew hedge at Fownhope, near Hereford, when he slipped on a wet, grassy bank and cut the jugular vein in his neck with the shears. He bled to death before an ambulance arrived. *Sun, D.Telegraph, 29 Aug 1992.*

DENTAL DOOM

† Mrs Rose Neale, 58, of Orpington, Kent, was so scared of dentists she never visited one in her life. She contracted oral thrush from her rotting teeth, which caused a blood infection and developed into meningitis, from which she died. *D.Telegraph, 26 Sept 1992.*

DEATH IN VENICE

† Giorgio Scrimin, 55, was kept awake by a howling cat and leaned out of a bedroom window to hit it with a broom. The cat sprang on to the roof of the house in Venice, dislodging a lump of marble which fell on Senor Scrimin's head and killed him. *Today, D.Star, 5 Oct 1992.*

POOTIE'S PECKER

Joe 'Pootie' Newman, the jazz trumpeter, died in July aged 69. He was Lionel Hampton's lead soloist and later Count Basie's. "He had a masterly control of his instrument, a uniquely rhythmic way with the valves, a remarkable potency", according to his obituary in the *Daily Telegraph* (14 July 1992). "A diminutive, gregarious figure, Newman was a keen ladies' man. Three years ago he submitted to the surgeon's knife for a penile implant. The operation was not a success. A build-up of pressure brought about a series of embarrassing explosions (one of them in a restaurant) and internal bleeding ensued. He eventually died of a blood clot on the brain." *The Times* helpfully added that Newman's last album was called 'Hangin' Out'.

LUCKY FOR SOME

A sizable body of folklore has accrued to the number 23 – see, for instance, *The 23 Phenomenon* by Robert Anton Wilson [**FT23:32**].

Usually, attention is focussed upon its sinister aspect, but for Richard Connolly, a pub manager in Douglas, Isle of Man, it is a lucky number.

His recent 23rd birthday fell on the 23rd of September; so, at 23:23 hours that day he placed a bet of £23 on the number 23 on the roulette wheel at his favourite gambling place, the Palace Casino in Douglas. He won £571.

"I was staggered when the ball popped into 23," he said. He would have won a lot more if he had had the conviction to resist hedging the bet by splitting it between the numbers each side. *Sun, 25 Sept 1992.*

SNACKING ON SNAKES

■ According to AFP, a one-year-old boy in Ra's Al-Khaimah, one of the United Arab Emirates, caught and bit a snake in two. Ali Mohammed Khatiri was found by his mother playing with the pieces, and was rushed to the Saqr Hospital for tests. He was OK. *Bangkok Nation, 15 Aug 1992.*

■ Krishnan Muniandy, of Seremban, Malaysia, was so angry with the foot-long unidentified snake that bit him that he swallowed it to… "teach it a lesson". When he complained of violent stomach pains, neighbours sent him to hospital where doctors confirmed by X-ray that the snake was dead. Krishnan wasn't so sure: "I can still feel something moving in my stomach," he complained. [*Reuters*] *26 Aug 1992.*

■ In the Table Mountain region of Natal, a huge python dropped from a tree onto Edward Mkhize. Alone and unarmed, he fought the 3.5m-long, 40kg snake for half an hour, biting its throat and twisting its head. Eventually, he succeeded in crushing and breaking its spine and, seemingly none the worse for his ordeal, dragged his trophy home. *D.Telegraph, 17 Sept 1992.*

■ Shelley Bovington, a security guard, was not made of such stern stuff as the above three characters. She fled from her kitchen in Hove, Sussex, on her 24th birthday when a foot-long brown and red snake of unidentified species popped out of her toaster. Council officials searched her flat for further snakes. *Guardian, 14 Aug 1992.*

ROCK 'N' ROLL EARTHQUAKE

The pop group Madness played two re-union gigs in Finsbury Park, north-east London, on the weekend of 8/9 August 1992 – their first for six years. It was probably "One Step Beyond" that set the crowd of over 30,000 into a stomping rhythm that shook the neighbouring buildings with a quake estimated at magnitude 2 on the Richter scale. Appropriately, the song contains the words "earthquake eruption".

The quakes hit at 9:30 on Saturday and 9:00 on Sunday; the Sunday concert began half an hour earlier. The seismograph at the Science Museum, four miles away, didn't pick up any movement; but London sits on a bed of clay, lousy stuff for recording quakes. The buildings most affected – Anwell Court, Green Lanes and Rowley Gardens – were nine-storey tower blocks. Only people above the fifth floors felt anything, which suggested to Alice Walker of the British Geological Survey that the shockwave had a frequency of 2Hz – two vibrations a second. Sound at this wavelength is below our hearing threshold, but can be felt up the spine.

Windows, ceilings and balconies were cracked, and tenants called the fire brigade. One tenant described his building "moving in a circular motion – it was like walking on an aeroplane." On the Sunday night, 30 tenants, a dozen fire officers, eight police officers and a council surveyor gathered outside the Rowley Gardens flats.

In 1984 and 1987, U2 concerts in Brussels formed very precise patterns on a seismometer five kilometres away. *Guardian, 11+26 Aug; D Mail, 18+26 Aug 1992.*

MEDICAL BAG

FIRST SEX ORGAN SWAP

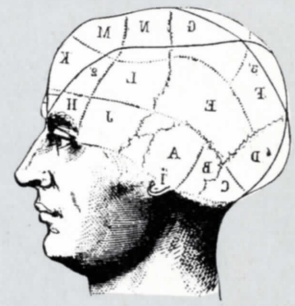
Chinese surgeons have performed what is believed to be the world's first direct sex swap in July, according to Xia Zhao Ji, a doctor on the operating team at Beijing Number Three Hospital (where China's first sex-change operations took place in 1984). The 22-year-old woman received the testicles of a 30-year-old man, who received her ovaries. A penis for the woman was constructed from her stomach lining, while the man's penis was replaced with a vagina made of leather.

Both patients were recovering well, but the former woman must take immunosuppressive drugs to overcome rejection of the new organs, and further operations will be necessary for her to have an erection. Both patients are single and hope to find marriage partners, although neither will be able to procreate. Neither knows the other's identity and both wish to remain anonymous. "The man thinks that women are clean and men are dirty", the physician said. "The woman thinks that it's better for her career to be a man." *[Reuters] 24 July 1992.*

SPEECH RETURNS

● An Algerian newspaper reported a remarkable recovery. Ziane Bensahli, 28, lost his voice after five men beat him and threatened to kill him. Doctors could not help, but villagers suggested whisky. "On the ninth day, he was able to talk again. First noises, then whispers, then words." An odd story from a Muslim country. *[AFP] 15 April 1992.*

● The day her first husband died in 1956, Martha Ouellette of Van Buren, Maine, began to lose her voice and her speech gradually became unintelligible. For 35 years, through a second marriage and the births of 35 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren, listeners had to guess what she was trying to say. Recently, her son, The Rev. Roland Lajoie, met a woman who sounded a lot like his mother. She had a disorder called spasmodic dysphonia, caused by muscles getting overstimulated and contracting too tightly.



As many as 30,000 Americans are believed to suffer from this disorder, but only a few thousand have been diagnosed. Lajoie found that sufferers can speak normally with small injections of botulism toxin in the vocal chords. His 80-year-old mother had her first injection last November and was talking intelligibly two days later. *[AP] 22 June 1992.*

PIONEERING BRITON

British veterinary surgeon Chris Smith, 36, died after carrying out a post mortem examination on a horse in a Californian university. He is believed to be the first person to die from Valley Fever – a condition found only in Arizona. Locals are believed to be mostly immune to it. *D. Telegraph, D. Mail, 28 July 1992.*

HORSEWATCH

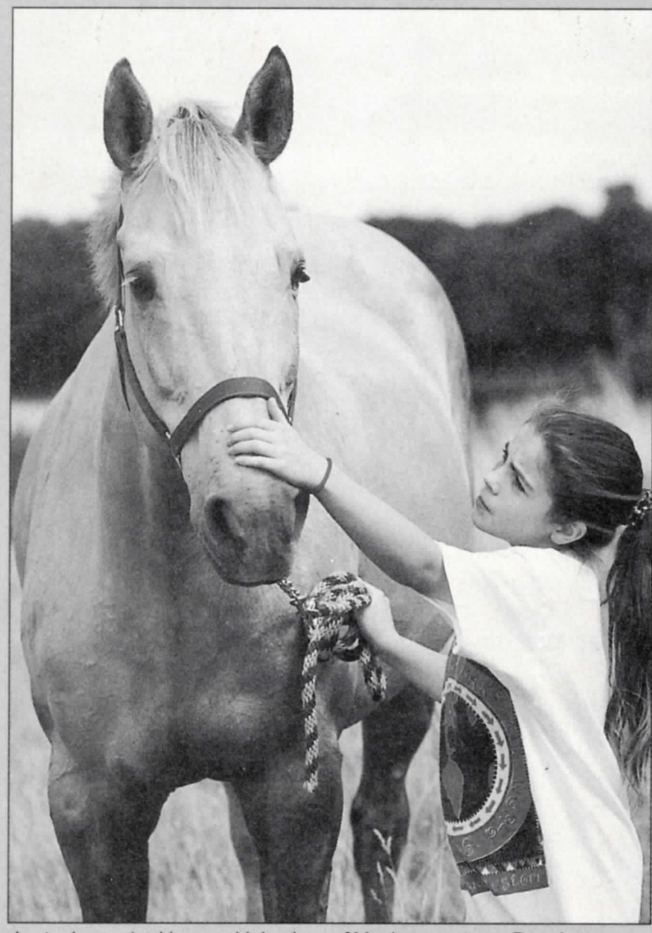
Following our report on Swedish horse ripping (**FT64:18**), we have received similar reports from Britain. Equine mutilation in Hampshire, usually in the summer months, has reached a new peak this year. The last major peak was in 1983/4. Local vet Andrew Kennedy became aware of the attacks 15 years ago, and has seen over 30 injured animals, while his colleagues tell of similar numbers, suggesting that hundreds have been attacked.

Blunt Objects

Some have been stabbed; others have suffered sexual injuries from knives, hammers and blunt objects. Because many of the attacks took place on or near the full moon, Hampshire police have suggested that a satanic cult could be at work; but as with similar rumours in the USA over cattle mutilation, no evidence is forthcoming. Fifteen assaults have been reported since March this year, mostly in the Meon Valley southeast of Winchester, where some residents have started 'Horsewatch' schemes.

Millie, a 15-year-old thoroughbred mare belonging to Olive and David Gray, was assaulted at Alton in April. The attacker avoided security devices to enter a locked stable 400 yards from the house. Millie's rear quarters were cut and there was evidence of an attempt to force a blunt object into her vagina. She had to be put down a month later.

Annie, a thoroughbred mare belonging to Davy Jones, former singer with the Monkees, was stabbed in the shoulder on 13 July in a paddock at Shirrell Heath, three miles from the Jones's house near Hambledon. The following night (a full moon), Chrissy, a palomino mare also belonging to the Jones's, was attacked in a field next to the house. Her hind quarters, back legs and genitals had been cut, and something, perhaps a broom handle or fence post, had been forced inside her vagina. Both horses recovered, but Chrissy, a pet for the two daughters, was traumatised and badly swollen. *Independent, 13 Aug + 16 Sept; The News (Portsmouth), 15 Aug 1992.*



Jessica Jones, the 11-year-old daughter of Monkees ex-singer Davy Jones, comforts her pet mare Chrissy after the mutilation attack

Ritual Sacrifice

Two years ago, there was a rumour that a white horse was mutilated below White Horse Hill at Bratton in Wiltshire, near the scene of Operation Blackbird, the crop circle watch set up by Colin Andrews and Pat Delgado, which was going on at the time. Two crop circle watchers, Eddie and Vince, who requested anonymity, were camping on White Horse Hill. On the morning of 29 July 1990 they allegedly found the dead horse with its feet caught in a fence. Its genitals and one ear had been removed. There was still a mass of foam protruding from each nostril, suggesting that the attack was only an hour or two old. The only blood was a spot the size of a coin about four feet away.

The local police were notified, after which no-one else was allowed to visit the site. A policeman told Colin Andrews that the horse had run into the fence and had a heart attack; however, as a result of an inquiry by researcher Clive Potter last December, it was found that the local police had no record of the incident. Potter still believes the mutilation took place and blames a black occult group such as the Friends of Hecate, "who are known to be based in Wiltshire." A similar rumour surfaced last summer at Alton Barnes in Wiltshire: a mutilated sheep was supposedly found lying on an altar. *Swindon Evening Advertiser, 10 July 1992.*

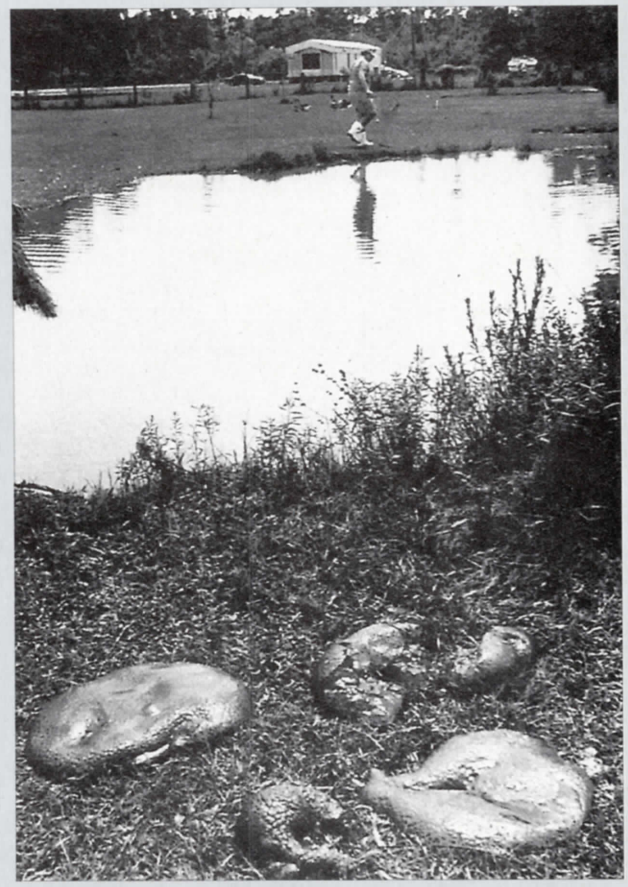
Dead Donkey

A donkey called Sophie was found hacked to death near its owner's home at Howth Head near Dublin. Its body had been "elaborately mutilated", according to the Scottish Daily Mail (2 August 1992); the *Edinburgh Evening News* (5 August) said it had "satanic symbols carved on its head". The killing was linked to the so-called Lunar Sabbath. The *Donegal Democrat* (20 August) adds further details: a rib was torn out and the liver removed. The atrocity is compared to one last year. On 28 June 1991, a donkey was taken from the Richard Martin Restfields, Glengeary, Ramelton, Donegal. Its front and back legs were skinned to the bone and the animal was then returned the following morning in a terrible state.

AMERICAN BLOBS

Hurricane Andrew stirred up something weird in Elwood Guillot's pond in Independence, Louisiana, off Interstate 55, about 50 miles north of New Orleans. Nobody was really sure if the transparent gelatinous blobs are animal, vegetable or chemical. They were found on 26 August by Elwood's grandson Michael, out inspecting the storm damage. The main blob was a bit smaller after three days, but was still more than a foot across. Michael Guillot plunged his net into the pond and came up with several more blobs. Biologist Bob Thomas said the blobs were "harmless crowds of single cell organisms", which doesn't really leave us any the wiser. *[AP] 29 Aug 1992.*

● Nick Glazier, owner of a duck hunting lodge on the north shore of Rondeau Bay, near Shrewsbury, Ontario, spotted a 'blob' floating in a pond beside his lodge. "We tried to catch it with a fish net, but it swam underwater and disappeared", he said. "But a week later we discovered it once again and managed to catch it." He called the Ministry of Natural Resources and was told the 'blob' could be from the Tropics (...eh?) *Victoria (BC) Times-Colonist, 8 Sept 1992.*



RIGHT: The blobs from Michael Guillot's pond.

THE GREAT APE ESCAPE

At the end of August, the winds of Hurricane Andrew made mincemeat of cages and holding pens over much of southern Florida. At the Mannheimer Primatological Foundation near the Everglades, most of the 2,000 monkeys and 500 baboons ran off into the night. A few miles to the northeast, several hundred of the 550 baboons and monkeys at the University of Miami's Perrine Primate Center broke loose. Four weeks after the storm, more than 1,500 monkeys and baboons had been captured. Another 200 or so were shot to death, mostly by people edgy over 'unfounded' rumours that they monkeys were infected with the AIDS virus from their use in research. But hundreds were still at large.

There was plenty to see in the new wild kingdom of south Dade County. A baboon shook off a blast from a 9mm pistol and lumbered away. Llamas were on the loose. Exotic birds darted through the recovering foliage and scorpions crawled for cover. Three cougars lounged near a highway. Peacocks wandered through a gutted beer warehouse. A strange species of deer, unlike any found in North America, led three National Guardsmen on a chase. Escaped pythons curled up in dark nooks and crannies, while mambas and gaboon vipers slithered off to points unknown. "It's like a Disney World of exotic animals out there", said Todd Hardwick, owner of Pesky Critters, an animal capture business. Many animals will remain uncaught and some will probably breed and become part of southern Florida's wildlife. *Hartford (CT) Courant, 23 Sept 1992.*

GOLDBLATT'S HYPOTHESIS

The Ellis Van Creveld syndrome, whereby people are born with 12 fingers and 12 toes, may have been brought to an isolated Aboriginal community in southwestern Australia by Dutch sailors from the *Zuytdorp*, wrecked off the coast in 1712. That's the hypothesis of Jack Goldblatt at the Princess Mary Hospital in Perth, published in the latest *Medical Journal of Australia.*

"We know from Aboriginal traditions that a large number of red-haired foreigners had been there", said hospital spokesman Ian Wallpole. "It is possible that they were descendants of the Dutch crew. When the wreck of the *Zuytdorp* was found 40 years ago, it was not far from the coast and the crew would have found it relatively easy to get ashore."

Other symptoms of the syndrome include heart defects and abnormally short limbs. The only other place in the world where the syndrome is found in concentrated form is among the Amish of Pennsylvania, where its incidence is as high as five per 1,000 births. Among the Aborigines, it is found in concentrations of one in 6,000 births. Recessive genes can take hold in such isolated communities where there is relatively little genetic intermixing.

The research in Perth began when two Aboriginal babies were born with the syndrome thousands of miles apart and it transpired that the mothers were related. According to Goldblatt, it is possible that one in 39 Aborigines in Western Australia carry the recessive gene. *NRC Handelsblad, 17 Aug 1992.*

VIRGIN MARY GOES WEST

Balkan fighting may have defied the message of peace and love delivered by *Gospa* – the Virgin Mary – to the seers of Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, but the holy apparition, wearing a long grey coat and white veil, with a grey cloud wafting below her slippered feet, continues to appear punctually at 6:40pm every evening to Vicka Vita. Vicka was one of the original witnesses on nearby Mount Prodbrdo on 24 June 1981, when *Gospa* warned the world to mend its ways or war would come. Almost 20 million pilgrims have visited Medjugorje since then, 80,000 a day at the peak, but now there is only a trickle and the souvenir shops and guest houses are all closed. *Independent*, 30 Aug; *Denver (CO) Post*, – *Aug; Observer*, *13 Sept 1992.*

Monthly Visits

One of the millions that made the journey to the remote Balkan Marian shrine was Joseph Januszkiewicz, a 54-year-old draughtsman, who returned to Marlboro township, near Trenton, New Jersey, in 1988, claiming to have been cured of an eight-year-old back injury and long-time hearing loss. Six months later, on 17 March 1989, as he sat on a plastic bucket in his yard, praying and giving thanks, the Virgin appeared to him bathed in a golden light and told him: "My son and I have chosen you to do our work", and instructed him to pray for the conversion of sinners. She appeared daily until October 1990, after which she only visited on special occasions such as Christmas. On 31 May 1992, she told him she would call by on the first Sunday of each month, between nine and nine-thirty in the evening. His wife Veronica said she has not seen the Virgin, but did see the light from the first visitation and her husband kneeling and speaking to someone.

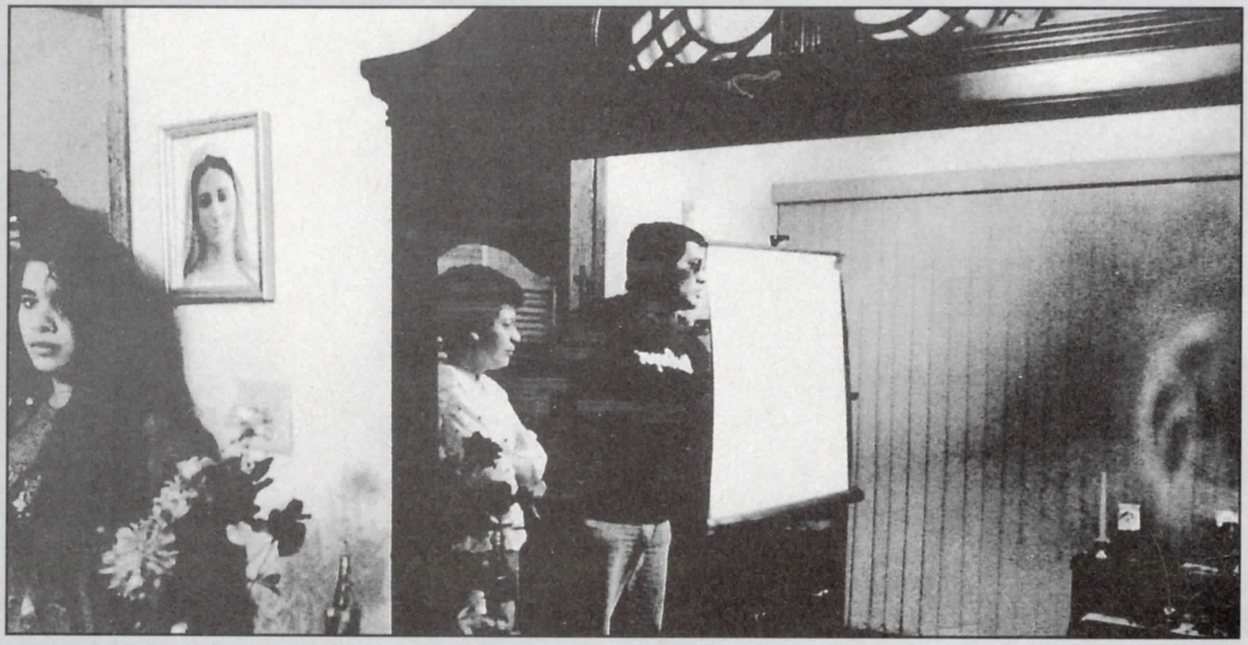
Plumbing Problems

On 7 June, about 500 people visited the Januszkiewicz home to pray before the statue of the Virgin erected in the yard. They were asked not to leave cash or gifts. On 5 July, more than 3,000 turned up, and on 2 August, between 7,000 and 10,000 came to pray. This time, according to Januszkiewicz, St Joseph appeared alongside his wife. He was wearing short pants, a cut-off shirt and a wide belt. Pilgrims turned up every day throughout July and August, with an average of 100 cars clogging up the country roads in the neighbourhood. At the end of August, Bishop John C. Reiss of Trenton advised people to stay away while an official four-priest commission investigated. The authenticity study will probably last six to eight months. The NIMBY (not in my back yard) brigade was very active, and the municipal authorities fretted about lack of portable plumbing.

Smell of Roses

On Sunday, 6 September, the crowd numbered around 8,000. No-one claimed to have seen the apparition, but many said they had been hit by a strong smell of roses, a phenomenon also noted in Medjugorje. On Sunday, 4 October, local hostility and cooler weather seemed to be taking their toll on the faithful. Only about 500 crammed into Januszkiewicz's back yard.

Newark (NJ) Star-Ledger, 31 July, 4+5+28 Aug, 4 Sept; Allentown (PA) Morning Call, 2 Aug; NY Post, 6 Aug; Hackensack (NJ) Record, 7+28 Aug, 4+24 Sept, 5 Oct; NY Times 29 Aug, 7+8+22 Sept; Trenton (NJ) Times, 6+7+8 Sept; NY Daily News + Philadelphia (PA) Enquirer, 7 Sept 1992.



ANOTHER BLESSED VIRGIN: The image on the right of this photograph is believed by many to be the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is reflected in a mirror in the bedroom of Patricia Galaz (far left) in Las Cruces, New Mexico. She claimed it began to appear around 6 March, two weeks before the photo was taken. Her parents are reflected in the centre *[AP] 20 March 1992.*

SWEDISH ART CRITICISM

Between February and June, five of Stockholm's favourite statues were badly damaged or destroyed by dynamite. The targets of the expressive art critic include a statue of Bacchus, the wine god, a monument to the chemist Carl Wilhelm Scheele and a statue of a centaur. In late May, he/she severely damaged a bust of Sweden's first social democratic prime minister, Hjalmar Branting, and on 8 June an explosion shattered a statue of a boy on horseback sculpted by Ivan Johansson in 1956. No one was injured, but scores of windows in the vicinity were shattered. The *modus operandi* is sticks of dynamite laid beside the allotted statue in dead of night and ignited with touch-paper. Police baffled. *Guardian, 9+12 June 1992.*

RECENT OOZINGS

■ Diane and Keith Fellows have struck oil – in their cellar. The couple, who run a building contractors in Lye near Birmingham, found the oil seeping into a well in the basement of the Victorian building. Concerned about the danger of fire, they called in a river inspector, who suggested a pump. The source of the oil was unidentified. *People, 12 July 1992.*

■ Malcolm Slocombe, who owns the Four Seasons Sheepskin shop in the Old Market, Glastonbury, (formerly a Chinese takeaway), is baffled by a mysterious flow of water in the cellar, which began around March 1992. Engineers at Bristol Water and Wessex Water say the knee-deep flood is not a mains or a sewer leak. Local folklorist Geoffrey Ashe believes the water could come from the White Spring which once flowed in underground streams with Glastonbury's Chalice water, reputed to have healing powers. Mr Slocombe was considering bottling the water; perhaps his cellar could become a place of pilgrimage. *Western Daily Press, 2 June 1992.*

NORDIC DIPLOMACY

The Faroes have released two new stamps celebrating Columbus *and* the 992nd anniversary of Leivur Eiriksson's discovery of America ('Leivur' himself probably spelt his name 'Leifr'). The text in the lower left corner, "Amerika funnid" means "America discovered". *Sydsvenska Dagbladet, July 1992*

■ Yellow slime is likely to close the Bavarian State Opera House in Munich for 10 months. The theatre's technical director, Volker Josefowski, explained that the old hydraulic system, responsible for all the movements of stage sets and machinery, was overhauled in stages in the 1980s. The old system used water, which it was decided to replace with oil. Not just any oil, but 50,000 litres of an ecologically correct, biodegradable, Dutch-made substance called Quintolubric, successfully used in other theatres.

The trouble was that some of the pipes from the old system were used and bacteria in the residual water found Quintolubric very tasty. The end result is yellow slime clogging vents and filters. The theatre's computer system senses the discrepancy in pressure, but doesn't know what the problem is, so it shuts down the whole system for security reasons. It cannot be restarted until the vents and filters have been cleared, which has led to productions being halted in mid flight. Eliminating the slime will cost around £15 million, although the ultimate costs, including the fees of performers and staff, will be far more. *Int. Herald Tribune, 27 May 1992.*

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

The Chinese *Liberation Daily* reported the death in August of a man called Wei, aged 22, who was convinced he had mastered the mystical art of *qi gong*. He stood (or lay, according to one version) on railway tracks outside Shanghai and tried to stop a 28-car freight train to prove his powers to his mother. He was crushed beneath the cow-catcher and killed. His family thought it was just an idle boast. "They never thought he'd really lie down on the tracks", said a policeman. [An earlier version of this story was set in Russia in October 1989 - see ***FT56:18.***] *[Reuters], Eve. Standard, Oracle, 19 Aug 1992.*

THE OLDEST BATTLE

The skeletons of two dinosaurs locked in combat have been discovered in the Gobi desert. "It happened about 75 million years ago", said one of the discoverers. "The carnivorous velociraptor was trying to tear to pieces an herbiforous protoceratops when both of them fell into quicksand." *D.Telegraph, 28 Aug 1991.*

A RUDE SURPRISE

The Polish weekly *Spotkania* reported that a Pole from the border city of Szezecin was rudely surprised when he visited a brothel in Germany. The sexual services were being provided by his wife. [For earlier versions of this yarn set in Tel Aviv, Israel, Nov 1989 and Teramo, Italy, Sept 1990, see ***FT58:17.***] Further details on the Tel Aviv case: the man was Jacob Beisvitz and the call girl who turned up was his wife Rachel, 27. The couple are now divorced. *D.Star, 1 Mar 1992.*

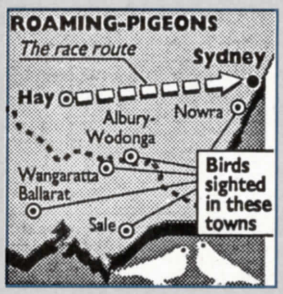
MIGHTY MOUSE

A mousetrap that doesn't kill is the latest invention by an animal-loving Californian. It simply throws the mice at high speed across the room. *Scottish Sunday Mail, 19 April 1992.*

BAD TIME FOR BONZO

A border collie named Bonzo, aged seven, leapt a farm fence near Nor-Aurdal in midwestern Norway, caught his foot and dangled upside down for nine days, living on snow while he awaited rescue, according to the Norwegian paper *Dagbladet*. "I had given up hope," said the dog's owner, Torstein Nerbraaten, after the rescue. *[AP] 23 Mar 1991.*

PIGEON TRAGEDIES



Champion racing pigeon Billy Blue arrived home in Crookes, Sheffield, after an epic 536-mile, 25-hour battle against howling winds and torrential rain. He had won the Central Marking Race from Royan in south-west France, against nearly 1,000 rivals, with a margin of half an hour. As he landed on the roof, a ginger tomcat pounced and carried him off.

"I'm sick to death of the animal", said Billy's owner, Patrick Lees, 55, who had been trying to win the prestigious race for 40 years. "It has had 11 of my pigeons over the past year or so, but I have never managed to get near it." There was some consolation, however. Ninety minutes later, a neighbour retrieved Billy's lifeless body, and Mr Lees removed the ring from his leg and clocked it in. The ex-pigeon was awarded third place and won a prize of £100. *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, 8 July 1992.* [For other last-minute avian scup-perings, see ***FT52:18*** *&* ***FT59:12****.]*

● On 29 August, 8,100 pigeons were released in Hay, south-western New South Wales, for the 340 mile journey to Sydney. The journey should have taken about six hours, but no birds turned up on the first day. Eighty made it the next day, while another 20% arrived a week late, on 6 & 7 September. The rest had disappeared, although some were turning up in various places far south of the route by the time of our latest clipping (8 September).

It is believed that the pigeons were attacked by falcons soon after they were liberated, then panicked and became caught in strong winds which swept them towards Victoria. Other factors included radar interference from the Parkes Observatory near Canberra and irresponsible shooters' clubs.

"I have had 61 years of experience with racing pigeons and I have never seen anything like this before", said Sam Beggs, director of the Australian Pigeon Fanciers Association. *[AP] 4 Sept; Sydney Morning Herald, 8 Sept 1992.*

● Only seven of the 99 pigeons in a Labor Day race on 6 September from Allegany, New York, to West Haven, Connecticut, had turned up two weeks later. No one had reported finding any of the others. It's hard to work out why homing pigeons lose their way, as nobody really knows how they *find* it in the first place. With the global rise in electromagnetic smog, we expect these mass avian disappearances to increase dramatically. *New Haven Register, 20 Sept 1992.*

PASSING DOC GIVES THE NEEDLE

Dr Robert Lambourn was driving to his surgery in Ashington, Northumberland, when he came across mangled railway coaches at a level crossing near Choppington. Two trains had apparently collided head-on. Sixty bodies lay scattered about. A police helicopter was overhead, but ambulances had not arrived. The doctor parked, grabbed his bag, burst through a police cordon and dashed to the nearest carriage where a man with a serious leg wound lay face-down, apparently semi-conscious.

As he prepared to inject the man in the buttocks with painkilling pethidine, the 'victim' said: "Do we really have to go that far?" The truth did not dawn on the doctor until he had given the injection: as his patient lapsed into unconsciousness, he whispered that he was perfectly healthy and taking part in a training exercise. The man, in his early 20s, was taken to hospital to sleep off the effects of the injection.

The exercise was in June, but details were only provided in September in a report to the county's public protection committee. A spokeswoman for the St Johns Ambulance Brigade said: "The victim was covered in gore and a great piece of bone was sticking out through his trousers. The poor doctor wasn't to know it was just something picked up from a butcher." *D.Telegraph, Aberdeen Press & Journal, 4 Sept 1992.*

RESTLESS BONES

Are we the only commentators to note the increase in thefts of revered relics, especially those of Catholic saints, in recent years? The latest purloined remains belonged – so the faithful believe – to St Christine, a 3rd century Roman teenager who was killed by her father for distributing his wealth to the poor. The bones were found in the catacomb of St Pontianus in Rome during the 18th century and brought to Cleveland, Ohio, in 1925, where they are normally on display in St John's Cathedral.

On February 19, a "well-dressed" man, coolly picked up the gold-trimmed glass case (pictured right) and walked out with it. Six days later the bones were found, undamaged, in the carpark of the St Saba Orthodox Cathedral in another part of the city, and restored to St John's.

This crime is about as inscrutable as you can get. *[AP] 25 Feb 1992.*

ROYAL BONES

The remains of St Edward the Martyr, King of England in 975 and murdered in Corfe Castle three years later (probably at the instigation of his wicked stepmother Aelfthryth), were found in a lead box in the ruins of Shaftsbury Abbey in 1931. King Edward was buried at Wareham, Dorset, after his death on 18 March 978. According to the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*, "miracles soon followed" and his relics were taken to Shaftsbury Abbey by Dunstan in 980. He was declared a martyr in 1001.

At the time the relics were found, the Abbey belonged to two brothers, John and Geoffrey Claridge, who disagreed on where they should be housed. The relics – fragments of lumbar bones – were kept in shoe boxes in a vault of the Midland Bank, Woking, until a High Court Judge ruled in April 1988 that they should be moved to the Russian Orthodox Church in exile at nearby Brockwood, Surrey, pending a final resolution of the civil action over ownership, first launched in the mid-1980s. Now, the Mayor of Shaftsbury, Mrs Janet Rider, is attempting to persuade the Russian Orthodox Brotherhood to return the bones to their original resting place in the abbey. If this was unacceptable, the mayor would settle for "a decent-sized piece of him, a femur, say, but we would accept something smaller." *Shrewsbury Evening Echo, 4 April; D.Telegraph, 6 April 1992.*

OFF WITH THEIR HEADS

About the beginning of April, robbers broke into a chapel in St John's Graveyard, Wotton, Surrey, where they forced the lids from two 18th century stone coffins. Cutting open the lead lining, they revealed the bodies of the famous diarist John Evelyn (died 1706) and his wife Mary (died 1709), which were quite well preserved by the air-tight seal and only just starting to decompose. The robbers decapitated the couple and made off with their heads. The purpose of the theft remained unknown, although Rev Trevor Southgate, former adviser to the Archbishop of Canterbury, suggested that the skulls could be used as drinking vessels in a satanic ritual. *News of the World, 5 April 1992.*

THE PICKLED CORPSE OF V.I. LENIN

In the first few months of 1992, the Kremlin was inundated with American bids for the pickled corpse of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, ranging from $1,000 to $27 million. It all began with a tongue-in-cheek report fashioned from whole cloth by Christopher Buckley, which he put in *Forbes FYI*, the Forbes business publication he edits. ABC News in Washington were taken in by the hoax and carried it on "World News Tonight" on 5 November last year.

The sealed bids were addressed to Victor Barannikov, head of the Russian Security Ministry, the successor to the KGB, which (in its successive incarnations) has been protecting Lenin's body since his death in 1924. A spokesman said all offers would be rejected, but the Americans would be thanked politely for their interest. Meanwhile, the great navigator is still on display in a bombproof glass case in his Red Square granite mausoleum. He is kept at a constant temperature of 59 degrees Fahrenheit. Only his wax-like hands and head are visible and it is rumoured that his corpse is mouldy following a bungled restoration job during World War II when it was evacuated to Siberia to keep it from falling into Nazi hands. *Seattle Times, 7 Nov 1991; Int. Herald Tribune, 11 Mar 1992.*

ICEMAN RUMBLES

As research continues into the Ötztal Iceman – see ***FT60:14*** and ***FT62:12*** – new puzzles are spinning off while the old ones rumble on. The dispute between Austria and Italy over ownership of the (possibly 5,000-year-old) mummified body has not been resolved; the discovery location was just on the Italian side of the border, but German scientists have the body.

One of the new mysteries concerns a pile of maple leaves found near the man. Dr Sigmar Bortenschlager, a professor of botany at Innsbruck University, said they had been green at the time of the man's death. Maple trees, we are told, do not grow above 5,000 feet, and the find was made at an altitude twice that. Dr Marcus Egg, a prehistorian at the Roman-Germanic Central Museum in Mainz, where many of the studies are being coordinated, added that some charcoal was found among the leaves, suggesting the 'hunter' had brought the pile with him for some reason. *Int. Herald Tribune, 23 July 1992.*

IS IT A HOAX?

Now the very integrity of the discovery has been called into question by a German TV team who point to the possibility that the whole thing has been a stupendous hoax. "We accept the man is about 5,000 years old," said Dr Michael Heim, head of the investigative unit at the Bavarian state TV (Bayerischer Rundfunk) in Munich. "But we are not convinced this man died up there in the ice." *S.Times, 16 Aug 1992.*

The nub of the matter is that the whole world has been so mesmerised with the uniqueness of the Iceman that few have questioned the "discrepancies" in the discovery itself. "The top half of his body had supposedly been lying exposed to the sun and melted snow for some time," said Dr Heim, "but there was no sign of deterioration. Yet within 15 minutes of it arriving at Innsbruck University fungus began to grow on the leathery skin."

Heim's team have posed other questions. Why were the cell membranes in the man's eyes not damaged, as they should have been after more than a year in extreme cold? Why was he found with a bronze axe when carbon dating puts his death *before* the beginning of the Bronze Age? Why were all his clothes and equipment piled up beside him? And how did so many fragile items (like the oval birch bark box) survive the slow-movement of tons of ice for thousands of years?

Naturally, this has raised the hackles of the establishment. Prof Konrad Spindler, of Innsbruck University's Institute of Prehistory Studies, said "I do not understand why Dr Heim appears to want to mystify the discovery or the circumstances in which the mummy was found." He does admit, however, to the "extraordinary" fact of the mummy surviving intact for so long under glacial conditions.

HUNTER OR SHAMAN?

The suppositions of Spindler's own team have been challenged too, as they proposed a scenario of the Iceman's death. He was caught in a sudden freezing squall and died of hypothermia, they say. Then his body was dried out by the Föhn (a hot wind over the Alps from Italy) and later embedded in snow and ice. Just how the body avoided decomposition during the transition to wetter conditions is not explained, and we wait with Heim for an answer.

This scenario has been ridiculed by another Innsbruck academic, Prof Heinrich Tilly, who calls himself an "outlaw" because he was not asked to join the Iceman study-groups. "If the man died alone, he would have been eaten by animals and birds of prey in five minutes," laughs Tilly. He has his own ideas based upon his expertise in anthropology. The Iceman was from a Mesopotamian tribe of star-worshippers, says Tilly. "He was the youngest of a group of priests who went into the high mountains to be near the stars [..] He would have been a willing sacrifice in a ritual involving days of dancing before he was placed alive in a special vertical grave. He would have taken poison before being buried alive to appease the moon."

ANOTHER FINE MESSNER

Well... we look forward to seeing how Prof Tilly came to these magnificent conclusions; but they are no dafter than any others. Meanwhile Dr Heim is cooking up his own ideas. He thinks the Iceman has an uncanny resemblance to an Egyptian mummy, and believes a hoaxer placed the mummy where it would shortly be found by hikers. Dr Heim has publicly pointed a finger at the famous Italian mountaineer Reinhold Messner. Messner is a man at the top of his calling, with a string of feats to his name that are both celebrated and unrivalled, yet when Heim calls him a "self-publicist" it is not from admiration.

For Heim, it was damning enough that Messner has claimed to have seen a Yeti, but there was worse. Heim claims that Messner, who was in the vicinity when the body was found, had described the Iceman's distinctive footwear *before* the body was fully prised from the ice. It is difficult to imagine the motive for such a hoax by anyone, let alone a celebrity loner like Messner … And where would anyone, even with Messner's wealth, obtain such a unique and unprecedented collection of items as the Iceman had with him? Messner was away climbing, and was not available for comment.
We await developments with great interest.

SORCERER BURNED ALIVE

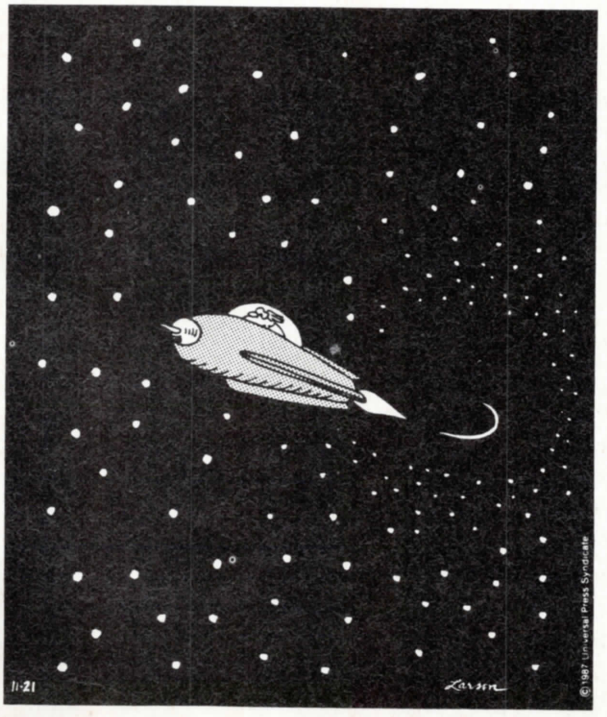
On the night of 25/26 September 1992, a group of young men set on fire the house of Baleibai Duilomaloma, 57, in the village of Qilai, 40 minutes drive from Suva, Fiji, while he was asleep inside. Duilomaloma ran out with his clothes on fire as his children and other relatives tried to keep angry villagers at bay. He hid in the forest with his family, but died during the night, while neighbours threw stones at his smouldering home.

Duilomaloma had been warned in a letter written on 9 September by a close relative, Fijian Member of Parliament Dr Ifereimi Buaserau, to stop practising sorcery or face being burned alive. The letter noted that Duilomaloma had two other houses, one in Suva and another on the small island of Ovalau, which had been burned down because he was practising witchcraft. Seven men, aged between 20 and 30, appeared in court on 28 September charged with murder. *Brisbane (Australia) Courier Mail, 29 Sept 1992.* [For further witch-burning in Polynesia, see ***FT55:32***.]

FAMILY TROUBLE

In the 'Bantustan' of Transkei in South Africa, back in January 1991, Mr Lizwe Qokolo, 32, was at the funeral of his cousin. He noticed that the body had "become flexible" and had started to breathe and bleed from the nose. He at once accused the family who had watched over the corpse during the night of witchcraft. Qokolo and his relatives manhandled the four members of the family into the house of one of them and set it on fire. They burned to death. Last March, the Supreme Court sentenced Qokolo to a quadruple life sentence and two of his relatives to 21 years' jail. *Ivoir Soir (Ivory Coast), 9 Mar 1992.*

THE FAR SIDE By GARY LARSON



Houdini escapes from a black hole

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3. **What was the name of the ship found drifting off Portugal in December 1872?**
   A) Marie Celeste B) Margaret Celeste C) Mary Celeste
4. **A bizarre hybrid mummy was found recently in the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul. The upper half of a boy was joined to the lower half of what creature?**
   A) Crocodile B) Leopard C) Dolphin
5. **Where was a baboon in leopardskin shorts seen climbing across rooves last June?**
   A) Basingstoke B) Cardiff C) Anglesea

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GARDEN GUZZLER

Journalist Nikki Rowlands, 26, of Gunnislake in Cornwall, was awakened on 20 June by "an awful crash" and looked out of her bedroom window to see the garden shed being swallowed by the ground. Two 30ft electricity pylons also disappeared and the power lines burst into flames as they were dragged onto the road, cutting power to 1,200 surrounding homes. Emergency services cordoned off the cul-de-sac in Woodland Way as surveyors checked for further movement in an area riddled with old copper- and tin-mine workings.

The 75ft-deep crater stopped 10 feet from the house and also claimed the lawnmower, the children's swing and the paddling pool. Mrs Rowlands, her husband Colin, 32, and their children, aged five, three and 18 months, fled the house, which was later condemned as unsafe. "Fortunately we had all had a late night and were sleeping in", she said. "If it had been a normal Saturday, the children would probably have been playing in the garden and I could have been pegging out washing."

A second crater, 100ft deep and 60 yards from the first, swallowed another garden on 24 August. The first the Wakem family, who have children aged seven, six and three, knew about the collapse was when newspaper delivery boy Michael Spicer, 17, ran into the house shouting that the garden had disappeared.
D.Mirror, Times, Western Mail, 22 June; Telegraph, 22+27 June, 26 Aug 1992.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

AFRICA Cynthia Hind (Zimbabwe), Ion Alexis Will (Roving). **AUSTRALIA** Greg Axford (Vic.), Paul Cropper (NSW), Rex Gilroy (NSW), Dik Gwynn-Seary (NSW), Tony Healy (ACT). **BELGIUM** Henri Prémont. **CANADA** Brian Chapman (BC), Dwight Whalen (Ont.). **DENMARK** Lars Thomas. **ENGLAND** Claire Blamey, Bruce Chatterton, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Hilary Evans, Peter Hope-Evans, Alan Gardiner, Mick Goss, Chris Hall, Jeremy Harte, Brian Inglis, Jake Kirkwood, Joseph Lang, Alexis Lykiard, Nick Maloret, Valerie Martin, Kevin McClure, John Michell, Ralph Noyes, Nigel Pennick, Andy Roberts, Paul Screeton, Karl Shuker, Bob Skinner, Anthony Smith, Paul R. Thomas, Nigel Watson, Owen Whiteoak, Steve Wrathall. **FRANCE** Jean-Louis Brodu, Bernard Heuvelmans, Michel Meurger. **GERMANY** Walter J. Langbein, Ulrich Magin. **GREECE** S.C. Tavuchis. **HOLLAND** Robin Pascoe. **HONGKONG** Phillip Bruce. **ICELAND** V. Kip Hansen. **IRELAND** Peter Costello, Doc Shiels. **JAPAN** Masaru Mori, Shigeo Yokoyama. **NEW ZEALAND** Peter Hassall. **NORTHERN IRELAND** Caryl Sibbett. **POLAND** Leszek Matela. **ROMANIA** Iosif Boczor. **RUSSIA** Vladimir Rubtsov. **SCOTLAND** David Burns, Stuart Herkes, Roger Musson, Roland Watson, Jake Williams. **SWEDEN** Anders Liljegren, Sven Rosën. **USA** Larry E. Arnold (PA), Loren Coleman (ME), James E. Conlan (CT), David Fideler (MI), Mark A. Hall (MN), Michael Hoffman (CA), John Keel (NYC), Kurt Lothmann (TX), Ray Nelke (MO), Scott Parker (TX), Jim Reicken (NY), Ron Schaffner (OH), Margo Schwadron (NY), Chuck Shephard (DC), Dennis Stacy (TX), Joseph Swatek (NB), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (CA), Robert Anton Wilson (CA), Joseph W. Zarzynski (NY). **TURKEY** Izzet Goksu. **WALES** Janet & Colin Bord, Richard Holland, Joe Kelly.

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...BUT GUESSES NONE THE LESS...
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...NO DISCERNIBLE TEETH – MUST HAVE LIVED ON A DIET OF SOUP AND SOFT SQUISHY PLANTS...
...AND, MOST CURIOUSLY, WE FIND A VESTIGIAL HORN IN THE CENTRE OF THE SKULL... ...A HORN THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN LONG AND SLENDER – LIKE A RADIO AERIAL...
SO, WE'RE LOOKING AT AN ANCESTOR OF MAN WHO IS DIM, WITH A BIG CONK, UP TO ITS EYEBROWS IN PRIMORDIAL SOUP.... ...AND EQUIPPED TO RECEIVE MESSAGES FROM, SAY – A SATELLITE ...OR A SPACESHIP...
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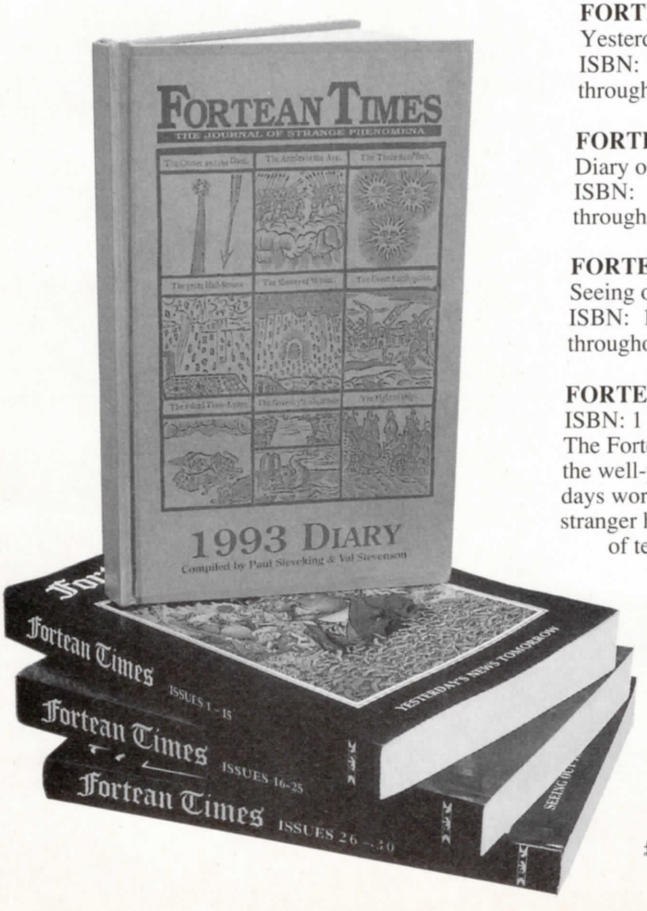
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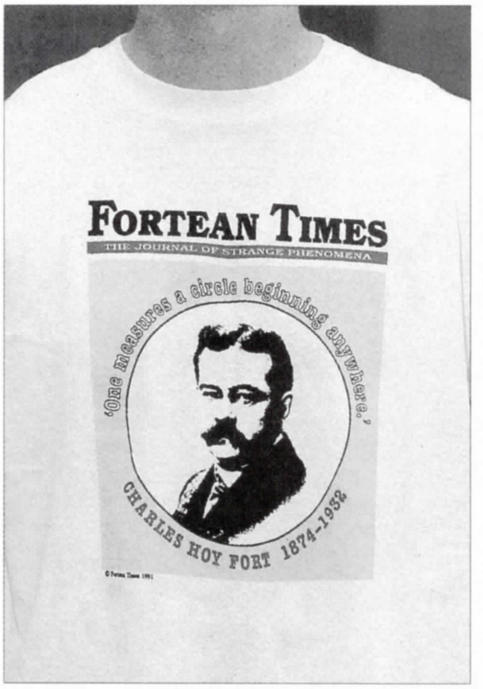

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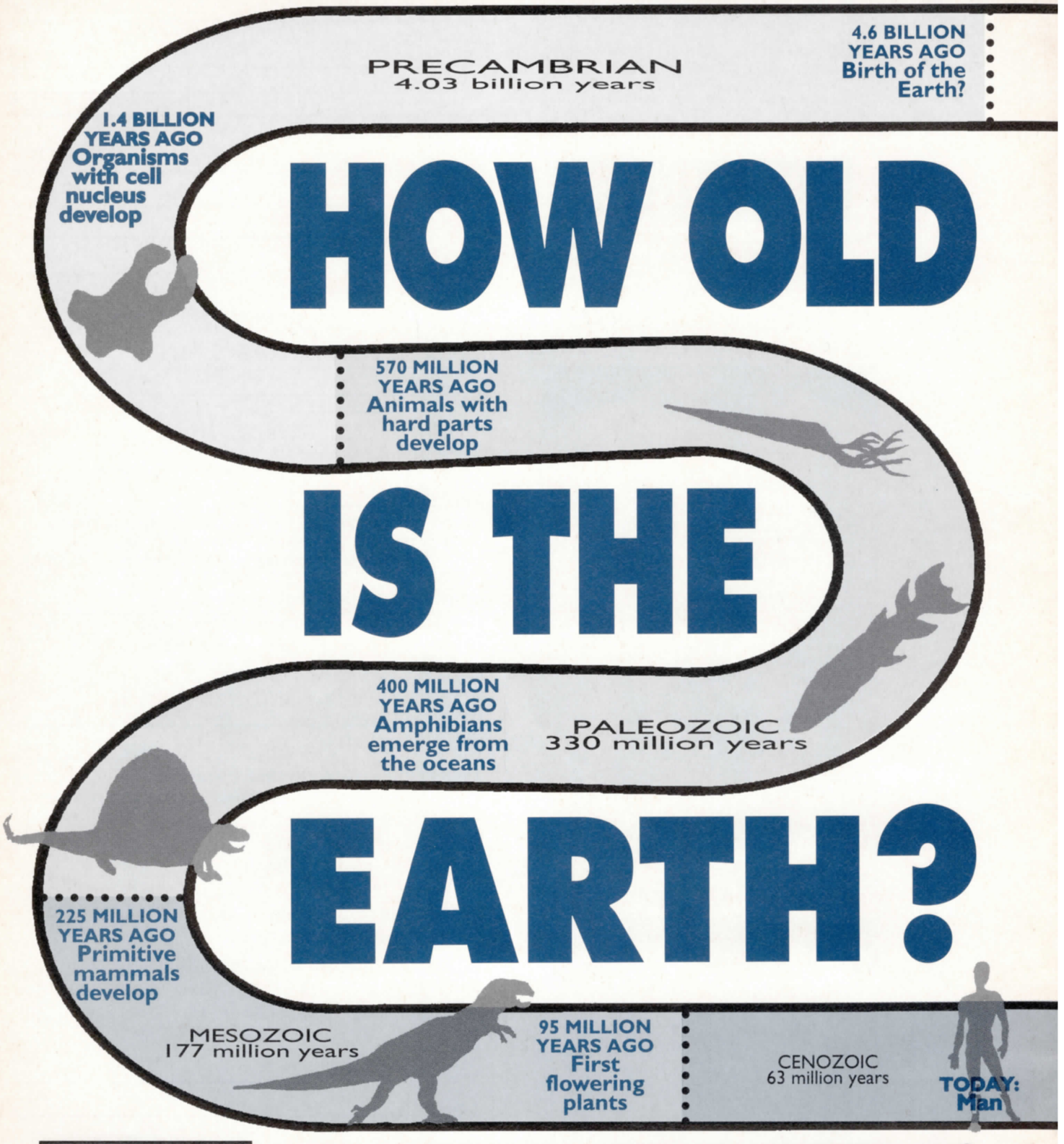
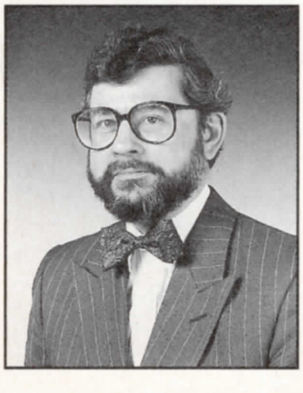




DID DARWIN GET IT WRONG?

The Earth is conventionally believed to be 4,600 million years old. Yet there is mounting scientific evidence that it may be much younger. In researching his new book, *The Facts of Life: Shattering the Myth of Darwinism* (published by Fourth Estate, £16.99), science writer RICHARD MILTON (left) found that geology has a hidden agenda which means the Earth has to be old – whatever the evidence says.

One day, nearly twenty years ago, I picked an apparently rather dry geology book, *Prehistory and Earth Models* by Dr Melvin Cook, Professor of Metallurgy at Utah University, and found my attention arrested by a sentence in the Preface: "An attempt to publish [a] manuscript giving direct evidence for the short-time chronometry of the atmosphere and oceans entitled 'Anomalous Chronometry in the Atmosphere and Hydrosphere,' not unexpectedly nor without some cause, met with considerable opposition and was not published."

Who on earth had prevented Dr Cook from publishing his paper, I wondered? And what could a metallurgy professor have to say that was so heretical that someone wanted to prevent its publication? I began to take an interest in geology and palæontology and became a frequent visitor to London's Natural History Museum and Geological Museum. As I asked more and more questions, I became increasingly aware that the conventional view was constructed on a precariously thin experimental and theoretical foundation. The evidence I had been offered – and accepted – for the age of the Earth and its development amounted to little more than hearsay and guesswork; it was weak and scientifically flawed.

"Practically everyone today has been 'sold' on the unrivalled accuracy of radioactive dating – after all, isn't that the very basis of our most sophisticated methods of chronometry?"

I also discovered that there is an important underlying reason for some scientists' belief in an Earth of great antiquity – a hidden agenda in geology. It is the unshakeable ideological commitment of the life sciences to Darwin's theory of evolution – that life has evolved over billions of years by means of random genetic mutation coupled with natural selection. Because the Darwinian mechanism *has* to take immense reaches of geological time to work, then the Earth *has* to be billions of years old.

Digging a little deeper, I discovered that there are many people, including reputable scientists in many countries, who shared my doubts about the age of the Earth and the soundness of the Darwinian view. But few professional scientists will speak out openly on an issue like this because the rules of the science game are that you receive funding for your research only if your papers are published in academic journals, and you get published in academic journals only if the Darwinist thought police say it's OK. Since virtually every scientist appointed to senior academic and public posts in the life sciences in Britain and America over the last 50 years has been a convinced Darwinist, then the chances of any alternative viewpoint being heard in the scientific press are close to zero. Anyone writing elsewhere can be dismissed as an eccentric or a religious crank who simply hasn't studied the evidence.

Some of those scientists who have spoken out against Darwinism or against an old Earth have been metaphorically roughed up by their colleagues. Others, who have made important scientific discoveries that tend to cast serious doubt on Darwinism, have simply published their findings quietly and without commenting on their implications for evolution theory.

THE EMERGENCE OF MARINE LIFE

So, how old is the Earth? The orthodox answer is that the Earth is 4,600 million years old. Life on Earth is said to have occurred spontaneously in ancient seas, some 3,000 million years ago and to have evolved over a period of billions of years by random mutation and natural selection.

The first thing that struck me is that life is not appearing spontaneously today in the seas. According to evolutionists, this is because conditions have changed since the first amino acids formed spontaneously in the 'primæval soup' and those early amino acids spontaneously formed the first protein molecule by some unknown process.

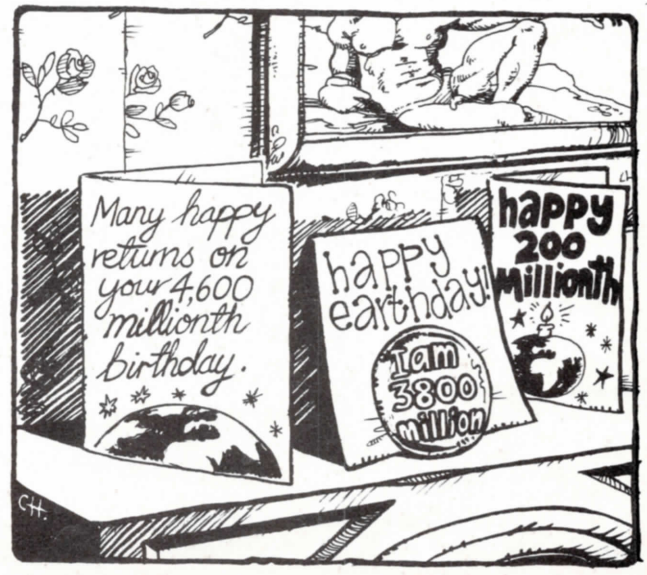
So how long exactly were conditions right for this spontaneous event? Obviously, the earliest date at which the event could have occurred was the formation of the first surface water on Earth after the crust cooled – the birth of the oceans – an event put by Darwinist geologists as occurring 3,800 million years ago.

The upper boundary marker for the spontaneous formation of life will equally obviously be the first fossil of a living thing. Until relatively recently the date of this event was problematical, but in 1979 Hans Dieter Pflug and H. Jaeschke-Boyer discovered the world's oldest microorganism – a fossil yeast – like cell which they called *Isosphæra*. But the rocks in which *Isosphaæa* was found had been dated as being 3,800 million years old – exactly the same age as the oceans themselves. So, far from evolving by random probabilistic processes over billions or millions of years, life erupted at the first opportunity – rather like a novice golfer scoring a hole in one the first time he hits a ball. This is not something that Darwinist geologists care to discuss because it rules out the idea of evolution by probabilistic processes over immense periods.

RADIOMETRIC DATING

The next question that puzzled me (and one that had obviously puzzled Dr Cook) was exactly where do Darwinist geologists get their enormous time scales like 4,600 million years and 3,800 million years? Like most people (including, I suspect, most scientists) I had assumed that these dates had been derived from a variety of sophisticated technical dating methods of unassailable accuracy all of which were in close agreement. In fact, I discovered, they are derived from a deeply flawed technique that can be applied only to a tiny proportion of rocks – the decay of radioactive minerals such as potassium to argon, uranium to lead, and rubidium to strontium. And these different minerals give widely discordant dates.

Practically everyone today has been 'sold' on the



unrivalled accuracy of radioactive dating – after all, isn't that the very basis of our most sophisticated methods of chronometry – the atomic clock that broadcasts from the National Physical Laboratory to the nation? But although radioactive decay lends itself well to time-keeping in the laboratory, it is hopelessly compromised as a historical timekeeper.

For its use in the field, radiometric dating is based on the premise that the kind of decay product into which radioactive minerals turn is chemically distinctive from the commonly occurring form of that mineral. For instance, uranium decays into two isotopes of lead called lead 206 and lead 207 which are said to be radiogenic, while common lead is an isotope called lead 204. In order to date a rock deposit, a sample is taken and the amount of radioactive uranium, together with the amount of radiogenic lead it contains, is accurately assayed in the laboratory. Since the rate of decay is known from modern measurements, it is possible to calculate directly how long the uranium has been decaying – how old the deposit is – by how much radiogenic lead it has turned into.

Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875), the influential Scottish geologist, whose *The Principles of Geology* (1830-33) provided the enormous span of geological time required by Darwin's theory of the protracted evolution of widely differing life forms.

NOT SO STRAIGHTFORWARD

This technique can obviously be very useful in some situations. When it comes to dating the Earth itself, though, radioactive decay is deeply flawed on a number of counts - and it was these flaws that Dr Cook's colleagues were keen should not be published.

Warnings about the techniques were issued as long ago as 1968, when scientists at the Hawaiian Institute of Geophysics discovered fundamental problems with the most widely used method of geochronometry, the potassium-argon method. C.S. Noble and J.J. Naughton measured the radiogenic argon content of basaltic lavas erupted into the Pacific ocean from an active Hawaiian volcano, Mount Kilauea. Ages calculated as up to 22 million years were found for lavas known to be from recent eruptions. Even more worrying were the findings of J.G. Funkhouser and J.J. Naughton the same year that lavas actually dating from an eruption in 1801 near Hualalei, and thus only 190 years old, were found to give potassium-argon dates ranging from 160 million years to *three billion years*.

The problem with the potassium-argon method turned out to be simply that the final decay products, argon 40 and calcium 40, far from being unique to radioactive decay, are very common isotopes in the atmosphere and the rocks of the Earth's crust. Cook has calculated that no more than one per cent of the argon 40 currently present on Earth could be a radiogenic daughter product and it is highly probable that some of the argon 40 in all potassium minerals has been incorporated directly rather than as a result of decay.

A very similar problem affects the widely-used uranium-lead method. If radiogenic lead – lead 206 and lead 207 from uranium, and lead 208 from thorium – really are uniquely formed as the end product of disintegration, then it is perfectly reasonable to suppose – as adherents of radioactive dating do – that there was zero radiogenic lead in the rocks of the Earth's crust when they first formed, and so we have a reliable starting point for our calculations.

What Melvin Cook pointed out is that there is another and quite separate mechanism by which common lead can be naturally changed into a form that, on assay, will be indistinguishable from 'radiogenic' lead. This transmutation can occur through the capture of free neutrons – atomic particles with enough energy to transmute common lead into so-called radiogenic lead. Significantly, this is a mechanism that would weight measurements in favour of an 'old' Earth, for too much 'radiogenic' lead would lead us to imagine that the process had been going on for much longer than it actually has.

"Cook has calculated that no more than one percent of the argon 40 currently present on Earth could be a radiogenic daughter product."

Cook has analysed the lead content of two of the world's largest uranium ore deposits – in Katanga and Canada. He found that they contained no lead 204 (no lead from non-radiogenic sources) and practically no thorium 232. However they do contain significant amounts of lead 208. This could have been derived only from lead 207 by neutron capture, says Cook, while all the so-called radiogenic lead can be accounted for on the same basis and the mineral deposits could be essentially of modern origin.

THE HELIUM PROBLEM

There is one further discovery relating to uranium dating which is of considerable relevance to the age of the Earth. The final products of the decay process are not only lead but also helium gas. Like the lead which results from the decay process, the helium is also a radiogenic daughter product, with an atomic weight of 4. In

fact, almost the entire amount of helium in the Earth's atmosphere is believed to be radiogenic helium, formed during the decay process throughout the major part of the Earth's history.

Now, if the uranium-lead dating technique were reliable, then the amount of this radiogenic helium in the atmosphere would yield a date for the Earth's age consonant with that yielded by measuring the amount of radiogenic lead in the crust. In fact, the dates are so different as to be irreconcilable.

If the Earth were 4,600 million years old, then there would be roughly 10,000 billion tons of radiogenic helium 4 in the atmosphere. Actually, there is only around 3.5 billion tons present - several thousand times less than there should be (0.035% to be precise).

"If the Earth really were 4,600 million years old, then some 65 million billion tons of dust would have settled on its surface, creating a layer some 180 feet deep all over the Earth."

Darwinist geologists have attempted to explain this discrepancy by assuming that the other 99.96% has escaped from the Earth's gravitational field into space – but this process has not been observed. On the contrary, we now know from NASA space probes that the Earth is moving in a thin solar atmosphere of hydrogen and helium resulting from nuclear fusion processes in the Sun, and is probably *gaining* these gases rather than losing them. Taking the measured amount of helium in the atmosphere suggests a date for its formation as recent as 100,000 to 1 million years ago.

Other similar radiometric dating techniques all suffer from the same defects. Radiogenic strontium – strontium 87 – occurs in rocks as a result of decay of radioactive rubidium. However, strontium 87 occurs both as a radiogenic daughter product of rubidium decay *and* as a commonly-occurring element in its own right. Typically, rocks contain ten times more common strontium 87 as radiogenic strontium 87. Rubidium-strontium is also suspect because it is subject to exactly the same neutron capture process as uranium-lead. This time it is strontium 86 which can be transformed to strontium 87.

DISCORDANT RESULTS

Most disconcerting of all is the fact that these various methods of dating commonly produce discordant ages for the same rock deposit. Where this occurs, a 'harmonisation' of discordant dates is carried out – in other words, the figures are adjusted in the laboratory until they seem right.

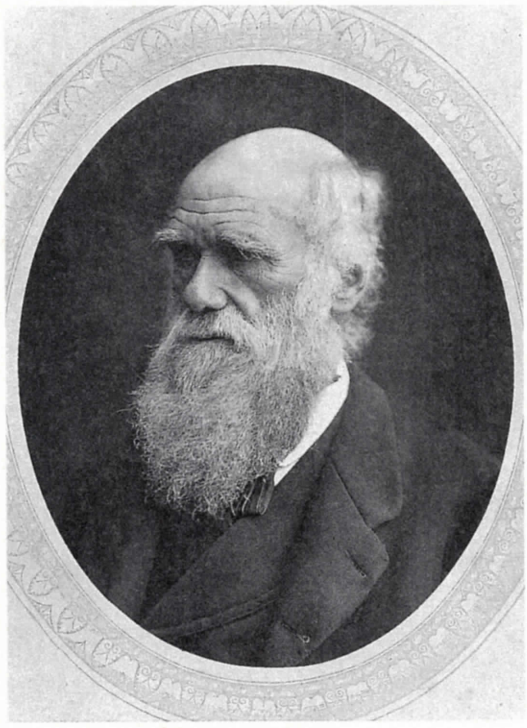
What are the findings of non-radioactive methods of geochronometry? Perhaps the most interesting is the discovery by Hans Petterson of the Oceanographic Institute of Göteborg, that the rate of intrusion of meteoric dust into the Earth's atmosphere from space is roughly constant from year to year at around 14 million tons annually.

It was pointed out by Henry Morris that if the Earth really were 4,600 million years old, then some 65 million billion tons of dust would have settled on its surface, creating a layer some 180 feet deep all over the Earth. In fact, the true amount can be gauged from looking at the Moon, which geologists believe to be the same age as the Earth, where the surface is undisturbed by wind and tides, and where there is just an inch or two of dust.

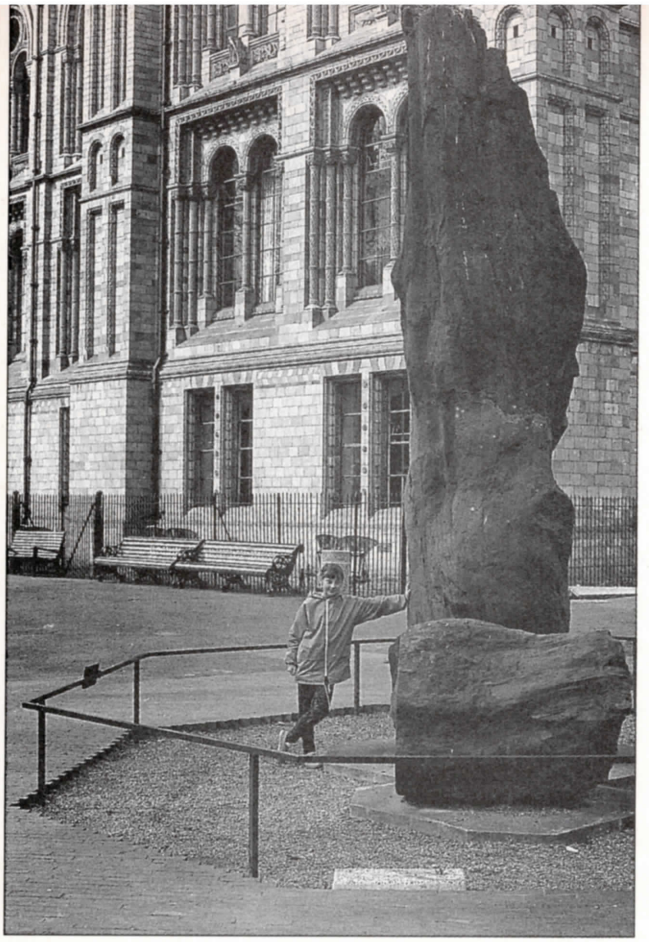
In one sense, it is rather surprising that Darwinists have embraced radioactive dating techniques so enthusiastically. True, these techniques have provided the billions of years of pre-history required by the theory. But – almost incredibly – radioactive dating is otherwise quite useless to evolutionists since it cannot be used directly to date sedimentary rocks – the rocks in which fossils are found. That this is so will astonish many teachers of geography and geology who have been led to believe that radioactive dating is the ultimate authority for the assigned ages of rock strata and the fossils contained in them.

The entire geological column of sedimentary rock strata which is a prominent feature of every natural history museum, annotated with the age of each deposit and the type of animal or plant life dominating each stratum, is dated not by radioactive decay or any other method of direct measurement, but by relative, inferential methods. These include, principally, the dating of intrusions of primary volcanic rock and ash (either by the potassium-argon method of Hawaiian fame or the equally duff uranium-lead method) and estimates based on assumptions concerning rates of sedimentation and rates of evolution of fossil species.

Indeed, as recently as 1970, Sir Gavin De Beer, formerly Director of the British Museum of Natural History, wrote in the Museum's handbook on evolution that fossils were dated by radioactive means. This claim, repeated in most school and university lectures and textbooks on evolution, is completely



Charles Darwin (1809-82). Inspired by Lyell's revision of the age and structure of the Earth, Darwin gathered data for nearly 20 years before publishing his theory of evolution in *The Origin of Species* (1859). His idea, that the huge variety of biological forms and functions is the result of the accumulation of minute mutations and adaptations over great periods of time, is still used as an argument in support of the orthodox view of the antiquity of the Earth.



LEFT: The fossilised tree excavated at Craigleith Quarry, Edinburgh, which stands outside the Museum of Natural History in London.

false.

Some of the evidence for catastrophic formation of rocks is so glaringly obvious that it is hard to understood how anyone can ignore it. Take, for example, the problem of fossilised trees. In 1959, Broadhurst and Magraw described a fossilised tree, found in position of growth, in a coal seam at Blackrod, near Wigan, Lancashire. Evidence indicated the original tree was a minimum of 38 feet tall. Such trees are common in coal beds. As the authors say in their paper, the find implies a rapid rate of sedimentation, not a slow gradual deposition of sediments over millions of years.

Equally puzzling is that the custodians of the official 'geological column' at London's British Museum of Natural History do not seem to have noticed that each morning, on their way to work, they pass just such a fossilised tree standing in the museum grounds, excavated at Craigleith Quarry, Edinburgh, which originally stood more than 20 feet tall.

Epilogue

When my book *The Facts of Life: Shattering the Myth of Darwinism* was published at the end of August 1992, I expected it to arouse controversy, because it reports on scientific research that is itself controversial, and because it examines Darwinism critically; but I did at least expect the controversy to be rational. Instead the book has been violently attacked and denounced by Darwinists in two magazines.

Richard Dawkins, a professor of zoology at Oxford and prominent Darwinist, offered to write a damning review of the book for the *New Statesman*, "lest the paper commission someone else who would treat it as a serious scientific treatise". His intentions can be judged from a small section of the language he uses: 'complete and total ignorance', 'harmless fruitcake', 'loony', 'stupid', 'drivel', 'needs psychiatric help'.

When he does write rationally, Dawkins gets his facts wrong. He says "All qualified physicists, biologists, cosmologists and geologists agree, on the basis of massive, mutually corroborating evidence, that the earth's age is at least four billion years."

In fact, one of the principal disclosures in my book is that some professional scientists, whose job is investigating dating methods, have published serious doubts about the sole method (not "massive, mutually corroborating evidence") of arriving at this immense age, that of radioactive dating. I give three examples in my ***FT** article.*

Dawkins is obsessed by the fact that one of the scientists voicing doubts about radiometric dating, Dr Melvin Cook, is a creationist. In Dawkins' mind, this appears to invalidate the evidence Cook presents. That Cook was professor of metallurgy at Utah University for many years, and a distinguished chemist and winner of the Nobel medal for his work on high explosives, is of no consequence to Dawkins. Cook's evidence contradicts Darwinian beliefs and hence must be wrong, whatever the facts say.

Dawkins also says that I think the Earth is only a few thousand years old. I do not believe, nor do I say, any such thing. I present evidence that current methods of geochronometry are seriously flawed and are preferred by Darwinists only because they provide the great age needed by their theory.

The other review of my book, equally intemperate, was anonymous and was by the writer of a leading article in *Nature*, probably the most respected scientific magazine in the world. He or she wrote that I believe evolution to be false – I don't – and natural selection 'a pack of lies' - I don't. It also issued a magisterial rebuke to the *Sunday Times* for irresponsibly drawing its readers' attention to my book's existence.

Evidently, both Dawkins and the editor of *Nature* agree with Sydney Smith, who said: "I never read a book before reviewing it; it prejudices a man so."

However, as one correspondent who wrote to the *New Statesman* in my defence put it: "When orthodox scientists resort too readily to ridicule and suppression of dissenting views, it is science itself which suffers." It is depressing to find that even in a country which prides itself on its tolerance, it is impossible to voice scientific dissent without attracting this kind of intemperate knee-jerk response.

FT

HEAD TO HEAD

A COOL DRUDE

IAN SIMMONS talks to astroarchæologist & rock star JULIAN COPE

Julian Cope first made an impression in the late seventies as a lead singer of *The Teardrop Explodes* and has performed solo since 1984. He has woven an individual and extraordinary thread through rock's rich tapestry since then, producing a series of stimulating and unconventional albums, which, with "Peggy Suicide" and the recently-released "Jehovakill", have taken an increasingly personal and spiritual turn. He is at present writing a book on stone circles as well as making a meditation album, putting together a Kraut Rock compilation and acting as producer for a new band called T.C. Lethbridge. So impressed was he by Avebury that he has settled there with his family.

FT You are putting together *The Modern Antiquary*, a book on stone circles. What angle do you take?

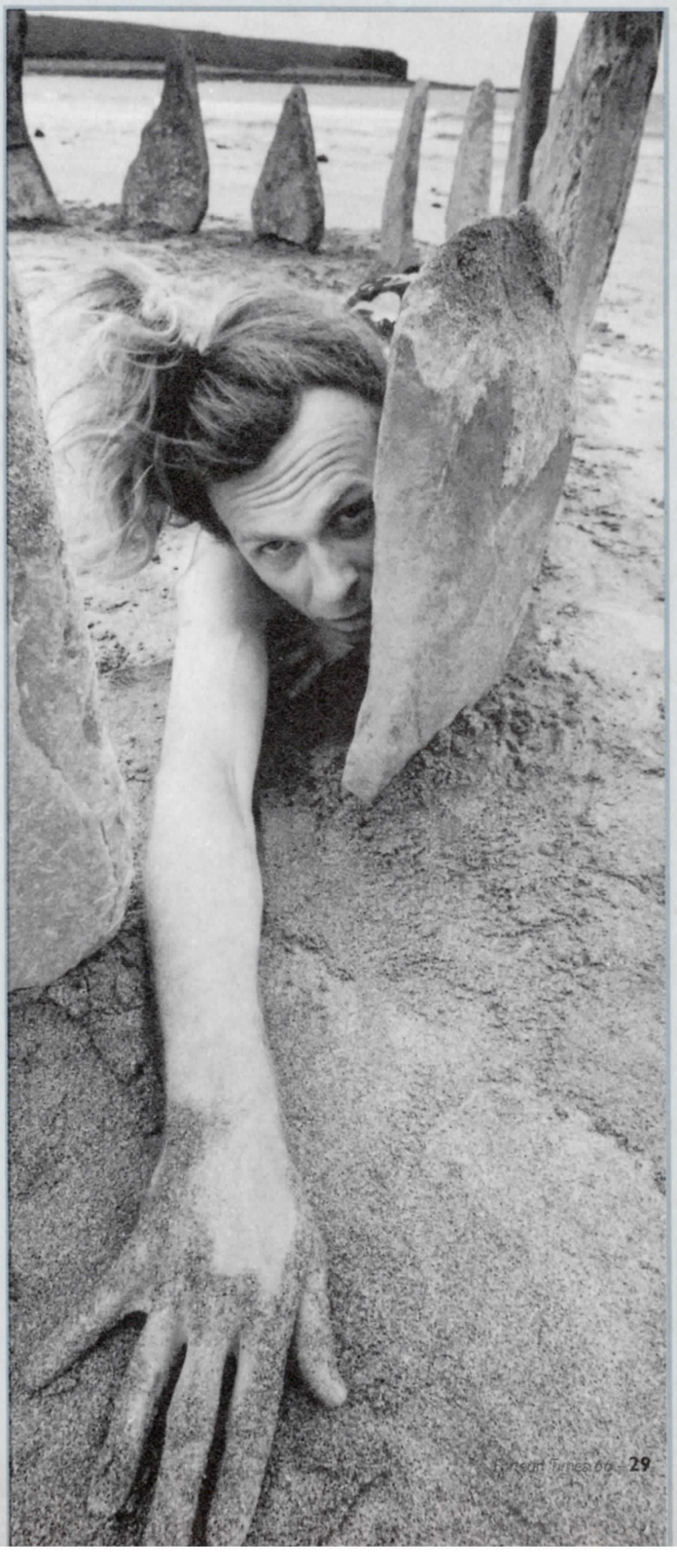
JC The book's really practical, but also very far out. Twenty per cent of the book is opinion and anti-archæologist rant, and the rest is this really over-the-top gazetteer of more than 200 sites. There's my photographs plus a page of notes for every monument – how it feels to go there and all the associated legends. I'm into astroarchæology, so there'll be dimensions too. The heavens were really important for Ancient Man, they must have ruled his life. There'll also be real visionary stuff.

FT Do you think you'll have problems getting the book over as most people know you as a rock star?

JC If a pop star does a book on ancient monuments, he's got to be much more thorough than anybody else, otherwise the archæologists are just going to sock it to him. I've got to take advantage of the fact that I can get people working on things in different areas. I did radio interviews on my solo tour of Scotland recently, and spent a few days in each place we went, so when it came to the gig, the local astroarchæologists would come and offer to show me sites, and that was really important.

FT I caught you in Thurso on that tour, I was going round the other way, starting in Aberdeen and ending up at Callanish.

JC Callanish is so special. We got friendly with Margaret Curtis, who was Margaret Pontin. She's written books on Callanish like *New Light on the Stones*, and she showed us lost circles and things. I think she is



ABOVE: Tomnaverie recumbent stone circle near Aberdeen.
BELOW: Loanhead recumbent stone circle near Daviot, Aberdeen.

a visionary and almost doesn't know it. She went to Callanish 20 years ago to prove it wasn't a lunar site. Five years later she found it *was* a lunar site and realised her archæological background was getting her nowhere. She's about 50 and married to this extraordinary guy called Elrond Curtis, an archæologist who excavated Stennes with Graham Ritchie.

FT I always liked the circles in the Aberdeen area.

JC Aberdeen was the thing that tripped me out most of all. We had Janet and Colin Bord's *Ancient Sites* and Richard Feacham's *Prehistoric Scotland*, but no-one told us till we got there that the recumbent stone circles are the greatest seam of mystical sites in the world. There are 118 stone circles in that area, a lot ruined, but the thing is, the Bords have only got three, so we just didn't know.

The ones I liked best were definitely Old Krieg – the books say it's been destroyed, but you can't destroy something that amazing. Tomnaverie is one of the weirdest ones.

FT I had to wade through a torrent of farm slurry to get there; it's besieged by cows. I am very fond of Sunhoney as well.

JC I loved Sunhoney, a very witchy circle though. They let 40 people do magic circles there during Beltane. I mean, I wouldn't even presume to ask something like that of the farmers. Midmar Kirk is another one; it's beside a church and it just paganises the churchyard. I see the recumbent stone and the flankers as like the Horned God, they go straight up like the top of Batman's mask. We were talking to the guy who looks after it, and his daughter, who's a 35-year-old autistic savant, was screaming her head off excitedly in the circle. A weird place to be.

Sunhoney, Midmar Kirk and Cullerlie, they're all in a line. Tomnagorie is next in the line. It's a later recumbent, when they started to bring the recumbent stone into the centre and the stones aren't such an extraordinary size. Now there's a really cool place!

FT You mentioned your book will be anti-excavation. Why?

JC Archæologists seem to miss the irony of digging away while saying "Wasn't it dreadful, all this nineteenth century excavation? If only they'd known what we know now it would be OK". Thank God Silbury Hill is still here, after all the times they've poked into it! It's only because it's so well made. You know about the Hatfield Barrow. It was in the Marden Henge and Richard Colt-Hoare dug into it in about 1810. It was a third the size of Silbury, but it was made of sand and within a year or two of digging into it, the whole thing was gone.

FT What do you do at the sites you visit?

JC I like to write up my notes at the focal point of each site. I couldn't do that at Skara Brae as there were so many tourists, so I went down to the beach and out of this Orcadian flagstone I built a circle of my own to feel what it was like to work with the stone. It had an avenue and a couple of outlying stones. After four and a half hours, I finally got to write the note, sitting in the circle.

As a companion to stuffy old English Heritage, I thought people of like kind should form "Head Heritage", which would build modern stone circles. There aren't any in places like Leicestershire; perhaps we could construct a whole ritual landscape!

FT In one of your interviews for "Floored Genius" [Julian's recent retrospective compilation], you talked about your astral travel experiences.

JC "Upwards at 45 degrees" [from *Jehovakill*] is my way of describing how I astrally project. The first time it happened I left through the forehead, a real third eye exit, almost like a tearing of the third eye. Energy came down and poured into me, right down to my toes; all this white light, like a heavy

liquid, like mercury, but blazing white, and I was like, "Ah blp! blp! blp!" gulping a really physical experience. It's never happened the same way since, but that fist time gave me the facility to do it. I have no real control over it, although a bit more now than in the past. When it first happened I was so excited – part of you just welcomes it.

bookcase, and came back brandishing a stone about eight inches long, dark grey with rounded edges and bell-shaped ends, very clearly worked by human hands.]

This is something that might be very *Fortean Times*. When we were in Orkney, I went to the Knap of Howa, the most northern neolithic settlement. It's like Skara Brae, only smaller and in the middle of nowhere – five hours on a tiny ferry. I walked 20 yards down the beach and found this. What do you make of it?

TOP: Recumbent stone at Midmar stone circle, Aberdeenshire, Grampian Region. MIDDLE: Cullerlie stone circle, Aberdeen. BOTTOM: Julian Cope in 1991.

FT With the 'New Age' becoming more mainstream, people have been more open to this kind of thing.

JC When I first started reading about New Age stuff, I was put off by the term 'New Age', because it's so dinky, isn't it? But as long as you don't throw it all out, you can find some great stuff. I always call people 'Dude', that sort of California airhead thing, so now I've started calling everyone 'Drude', a cross between 'Dude' and 'Druid'. People want to be New Age, but they don't want the crap side of it.

I'm doing this meditation album, and so I've been commissioning meditations. I said to some friends: "Would you write me a meditation? All it's got to be is very low key, with a beat of some kind and more than 15 minutes long." It will be better than a lot of this wishy washy New Age stuff. The album's going to be called *Rite*. It's got a picture of Silbury on the front and all the stuff I'm into, but its Drude music, a bit more of an urban meditation. It's like the tracks on *There's a Riot Going on* by Sly and the Family Stone, but 20 minutes each track. They always finish too quickly, you can't have sex to any of that music, although it's very sexy. *Rite* is urban meditation music, like really nothing going on, it's wah clarinet, bass and drum machine.

[At this point Julian leapt up, headed for the

FT It's certainly worked, but it's not the usual sort of tool. It doesn't look as if it was meant to have sharp edges. It's weird whatever it is!

JC Isn't it just! I call it a megalithic dildo. Do you think it was for giving the Goddess a good seeing to? I must find out more about it. It's going to be in the book.

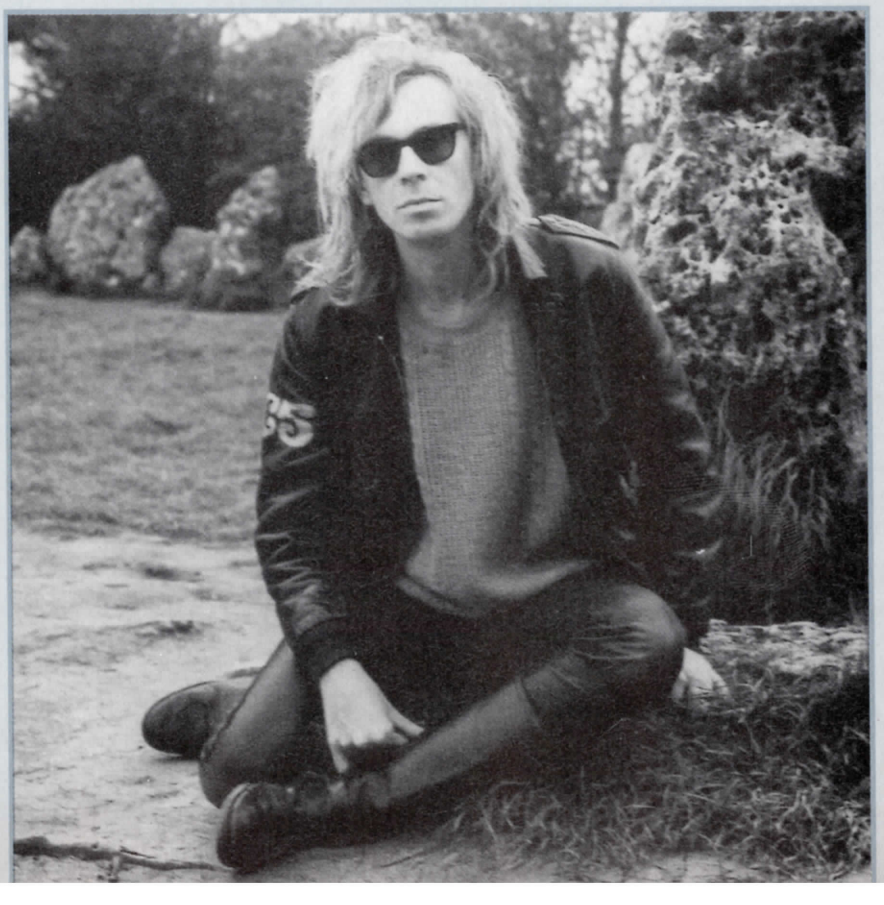
FT On the sleeve of *Jehovakill* you mention T.C. Lethbridge and William Burroughs and say that Lethbridge was 59 and Burroughs 43. Is this when they started writing?

JC It's when they became their 'headself' as opposed to just being themselves. I'm just trying to explain that whatever time it starts it's cool. I was going to say, "Grandma Moses was 70 when it came to her", but then I'd give people more of an excuse to put it off.

FT Fort was another one who came into his own late. The first of the books he's known for didn't appear until he was 44. Are you familiar with his books?

JC I read some of his stuff some years back and really liked it; and I've known about the *Fortean Times* for quite a while. You know, that sort of thing has to be done because wisdom comes out of places you least expect it.

FT



Tradescant's

IAN SIMMONS DESCRIBES THE CONTENTS OF THIS SINGULAR

One of 1992's less celebrated anniversaries is the tricentenary of the death of Elias Ashmole, founder of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum. This was Britain's first purpose–built museum, constructed by Oxford University to house the collections donated by Ashmole; the credit for the collection, however, lies not with Ashmole, but with two extraordinary men, father and son, both named John Tradescant, 17th century England's most noted collectors of curiosities. The Tradescant cabinet of curiosities, usually known as 'Tradescant's Rarities', or 'Tradescant's Ark', was founded by the elder Tradescant, a gardener from Suffolk who landscaped for noblemen, such as the Duke of Buckingham, and later worked for Charles I, taking charge of various royal gardens. He travelled the world in his capacity as gardener to the nobility, collecting new and rare plants for their gardens, journeying to Flanders, Russia, Algeria, Turkey and various parts of the Mediterranean. On these journeys he collected artifacts as well, both natural and man–made, and these formed the core of his collection, along with items collected by his friends on their travels. His work with the Duke of Buckingham helped him greatly by providing contacts from whom he could obtain rarities, as the Duke also collected them, in some cases using Tradescant as his agent. One letter from Tradescant on behalf of Buckingham requests that the Secretary of the Navy should obtain from merchants "... Anything that is Strang ..." for the Duke.

Portrait of John Tradescant the Elder painted by Emmanuel de Critz

In common with other cabinets of the time, those of Buckingham and Tradescant emphasised the unusual and extraordinary, with human horns, mermaids and unicorns taking their place beside Henry VIII's gloves and so on. This approach is largely absent from their successors, the modern museums, but could still be seen, over a century later, at the foundation of the British Museum in 1753, where items such as human horns had a place, and certain strands continued into the 20th century. Brighton's Booth Museum has a toad with the stone in which it was encased on display, Market Harborough Museum has a two–headed calf and there was much public outcry some years back when Ipswich Museum removed its five–legged rat.

The Ark

In 1628, Tradescant moved to Lambeth with his collection and there opened it to the public, earning his house the name 'The Ark'. When John the Elder died in 1638, the collection was substantially complete, and both this and his gardening duties were taken over by his son John, who presided over the next chapter of the collection's history.

Despite several expeditions to Virginia, John the Younger did not add significantly to the collection, but he did exploit it efficiently as

Ark

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

Fashionable ladies and gentlemen examine the curiosities at the Wakefield Industrial exhibition, 1865.

what would today be termed a 'visitor attraction'. Quite a number of accounts of visits to 'Tradescant's Ark' still exist, one of the best being by Georg Christopher Stirn in 1638. Among the items he records having seen are the hand of a mermaid, a giant human bone and a piece of the true cross. The mermaid's hand may have been a preserved human one retaining partial webbing between the fingers, or the paw of some sort of aquatic mammal; while the large bone was either from a giant, or more likely, from a large non–human mammal.

The history of the 'True Cross' is better known. Ashmole attempted to authenticate it and traced its origin to another piece owned by Charles I which was reputed to have been given to Edward III by King John of France. Tradescant the Younger was, according to Ashmole, entrusted by Charles' Queen, Henrietta Maria, with the task of taking it to France for her, and the piece in the collection was "accidentally" broken off while he did this. On the other hand, a colleague of Tradescant's, John Parkinson, describes it as "a great piece of true Lignum Aloes [..] as bigge and as long as Man's leg", and claimed it had actually been presented to Tradescant by the king. He also opined: "If all those pieces of wood, that are [..] said to be parts of that Crosse were all set together they would goe neere to make [..] many cart loads full".

> **"Tradescant emphasised the unusual and extraordinary, with human horns, mermaids and unicorns taking their place beside Henry VIII's gloves."**

Fanatical Astrologer

Ashmole entered the story in 1650 when he was introduced to Tradescant by his wife, the two families becoming good friends. The Ashmoles spent the summer of 1652 staying at the Tradescants and during this time they visited a witch trial in Kent dealing with people accused of bewitching children, adults, pigs, sheep, mares and grain, resulting in six women being hanged and various others (both male and female) being gaoled.

Ashmole himself was a successful solicitor and very able historian; he had studied mathematics, astronomy and natural philosophy at Oxford and was an early Member of the Royal Society. He was also an accomplished alchemist, writing the classic *Theatrum Chemicum Brittanicum*, and a fanatical astrologer, rarely making any move without consulting his horoscope. Coupled with this, however, was his determined and unscrupulous self–aggrandisement which governed much of his relations with Tradescant and the rarities.

Ashmole offered to catalogue Tradescant's collection for him, and this he did, working with Dr Thomas Worton to produce the *Musæum Tradescantianum* published in 1656 and paid for by Ashmole, who also attempted to take all the credit for it. The *Musæum Tradescantianum* revealed the full extent of the collection, catalogued under 14 categories, including 'Divers sorts of Strange Fishes', 'coins', 'Warlike instruments' and 'other variety of Rarities'. These categories contained a wide range of Fortean artifacts.

Recorded as being part of the Tradescant collection is a sample of "Blood that rained in the Isle of Wight, authenticity vouched for by Sir John Oglander". Oglander was the Royalist MP for Yarmouth and the period's leading authority on the island's history. It is thought that this was either dust containing iron oxide which fell in rain or a sample of red meteoric dust which fell on Wight in 1177 according to the *Chronicle of Brompton*, but as this is one of many items from the collection which is now lost, it is impossible to verify this.

Among the catalogued items which still survives is the portrait of 'Old Parr' which remains in the Ashmolean. Old Parr was a resident of Shropshire who lived to the claimed age of 152 on the estate of the Earl of Arundel, who discovered him in 1635. Parr was taken to London and presented to the king, but his new found celebrity did not suit him, and he died at Arundel House in London on 14 November 1635, being buried in Westminster Abbey.

Tradescant's collection also boasted a "Very Small part" of Boramete skin and a "coat lyned" with it. The Borametz, or Tartary Lamb, was supposed to be a plant whose fruit resembled a lamb attached to a stem by its navel. It was reported to be about three feet tall and grown from a seed similar to a melon. Inevitably, there were also

A 'mermaid' exhibited at a London show of curiosities

NOTES.
* This vegetable is called the Tartarian Lamb, from its refemblance in fhape to that animal. It has fomething like four feet, and its body is covered with a kind of down. Travellers report that it will fuffer no vegetable to grow within a certain diftance of its feat. Sir Hans Sloan read a Memoir upon this plant before the Royal Society; for which conſult their Tranſactions, N°. 245, p. 461. Mr. Bell, in his "Account of a Journey from St. Peterſburg to Iſpahan," informs us that he ſearched in vain for this plant in the neighbourhood of Aſtrachan, when at the ſame time the more ſenſible and experienced amongſt the Tartars treated the whole hiſtory as fabulous. This journey was undertaken in the year 1715.

The Vegetable Lamb of Tartary

The Vegetable Lamb of Tartary, from the Tradescant Trust, in the Museum of Garden History, St Mary–at–Lambeth, Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1. It arrived as a surprise gift from a Cambridgeshire doctor. The two John Tradescants, father and son, are buried in the adjacent churchyard.

The lamb's antique label reads: "This vegetable is called the Tartarian Lamb, from its resemblance in shape to that animal. It has something like four feet, and its body is covered with a kind of down. Travellers report that it will suffer no vegetable to grow within a certain distance of its seat. Sir Hans Sloan[e] read a memoir upon this plant before the Royal Society; for which consult their *Transactions*, No.245, p.461. Mr Bell, in his 'Account of a Journey from St Petersburg to Ispahan,' informs us that he searched in vain for this plant in the neighbourhood of Astrachan, when at the same time the more sensible and experienced amongst the Tartars treated the whole history as fabulous. This journey was undertaken in the year 1715."

Vegetable lambs were supposed to taste of fish and their blood of honey, and when their bones were placed in the mouth, in the course of "certain ceremonies and incantations", one was "instantly seized with a spirit of divination and endowed with the gift of prophecy". John Parkinson, botanist to Charles I, seems to have believed in the vegetable lamb; one appears in a woodcut, along with Adam and Eve, on the title page of his *Paradisus*, published in 1629.

Sir Hans Sloane presented a specimen, mentioned in the label to the Tradescant lamb, to the Royal Society in 1698. He correctly said it was part of a tree fern (*Cibotium barometz*), doctored to resemble a lamb. All but four of the bony fronds had been removed, and the remaining ones shaved and shortened to imitate legs. It turned out to be a popular toy in southern China, further east than vegetable lamb hunters had searched.

several types of barnacle, classified in the 'Birds' section due to the belief that geese hatched from them, a belief which still held firm in 1678, when the Royal Society published an eyewitness account of geese emerging from barnacles on a Scottish island. It recorded that the observer saw that the barnacles had "within them little birds, perfectly shaped".

Also on the bird front, Tradescant exhibited the "Claw of the bird Roc [..] able to truss an Elephant". This specimen, rather than belonging to the mythical bird as reported, was probably part of the elephant bird of Madagascar. This is the world's largest known bird, half as big again as an ostrich and weighing 450 kilos, which was last recorded in 1666. This bird may also have been the source of the collection's 'Dragon's egg' as the elephant bird laid eggs with an eight–litre volume, equivalent to 144 chicken eggs – although an ostrich egg has also been proposed as the true identity of this specimen.

Tradescant's collection also held another now extinct bird, the dodo. This was the preserved remains of a live one exhibited in London in 1638 which the Tradescants acquired on its death. It was later ravaged by rot and museum beetle, and was incinerated in 1755, although the skull and a foot were rescued from the flames and reside today, somewhat charred, in the Oxford Museum of Natural History.

Another item of note among the natural history specimens is an "Elk's hoof with three claws", reputedly a cure for epilepsy. In fact the elk was believed able to cure itself of the affliction by placing the hoof in its left ear, although the concept of an epileptic elk stretches the imagination somewhat. Ashmole also records in the catalogue a "Hare's head with rough horns three inches long". The specimen no longer exists and little is known of it, but it may have been the skull of a Muntjac deer, not at that time known in Britain, which could, because of its small size, have been attributed to a hare.

In the category of 'Variety of Rarities' several pieces described as 'Gamaha' are recorded. These were stones found in nature with images on them [see the simulacrum on p14 last issue – Eds], valued as amulets against evil. One of them was inscribed with the names Jesus, Joseph and Mary in Italian capitals; another portrayed a fish in it (probably a fossil), and another a death's head. Only the one bearing the holy names survives. This was said to have been found in water in the West Indies, and is made of mudstone; however, it has clearly been washed to inscribe the names and is not of natural origin, no matter where it was found.

Ashmole's Duplicity

Having catalogued the collection, Ashmole retained an interest in it and in 1659 managed to get Tradescant to sign a deed of gift while drunk, signing the collection over to Ashmole on his death, in trust for a University. Despite Tradescant's later attempts to cancel this, legal action by Ashmole against Tradescant's wife after her husband's death in 1662 upheld the deed of gift. Ashmole gained the rights to the collection as the major part of his gift to Oxford in 1683 on the condition it was housed in a museum named after him. This was the foundation of the Ashmolean.

Once in the Ashmolean, Tradescant's rarities did not fare well. They suffered neglect and decay, with much being burnt in the 18th century with the Dodo. Of the rest, some were dispersed to other museums and have been lost due to poor record-keeping. In the 1880's some were reportedly being kept in a shed open to the street, and as late as the 1960's, concern was expressed about the state of some of the geological specimens.

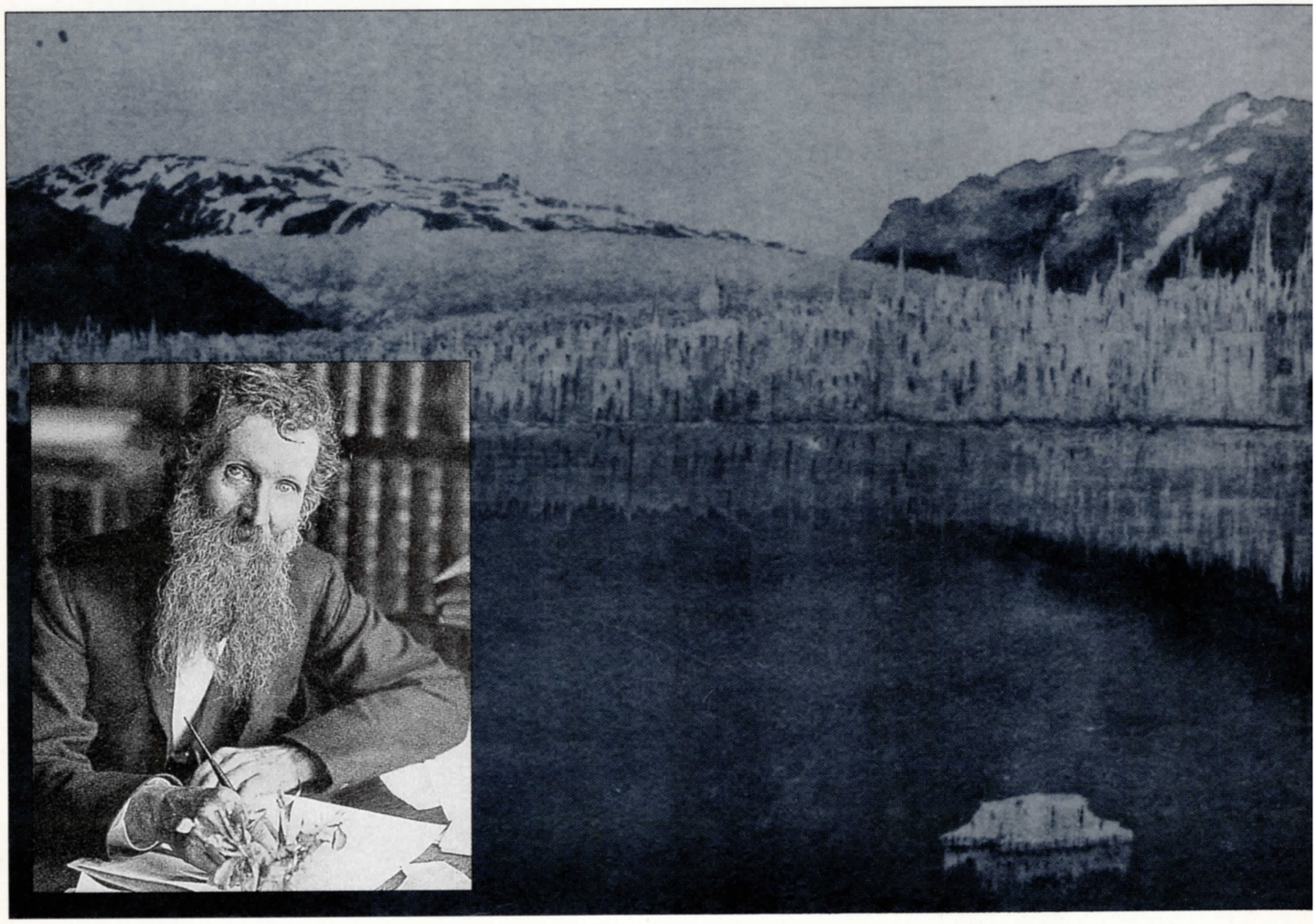
However, in 1976, the Ashmolean attempted to draw together what could be found of Tradescant's rarities and devoted a room to their display. Few of the Fortean items can be seen, though; time and carelessness has resulted in the loss of almost all of them, a pattern repeated in museums everywhere where the bizarre and atypical has long been out of fashion in collecting policies. Many Fortean items languish forgotten in stores or have vanished completely. FT

Portrait of Elias Ashmole, painted by Riley, now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

The tomb of Tradescant the elder, at the Museum of Garden History, Lambeth, London.

Silent City

In his book *New Lands*, Charles Fort lists several Alaska. According to tradition, this odd mirage



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

DWIGHT WHALEN is a resident of the town of Niagara Falls in Ontario, Canada, and has written about numerous Fortean mysteries in *Fate*, *INFO Journal* and *Pursuit*. His articles for ***Fortean Times*** include 'The Mississauga Blob' ***[FT31:4]*** and 'Stoned on Annie Taylor' ***[FT45:62]***. He is also the author of *The Lovers' Guide to Niagara Falls*.

"The Northern Lights have seen queer sights", wrote Yukon poet Robert W. Service. Surely one of the strangest, most spell-binding sights ever seen in the North are the reported appearances of a mysterious phantom city in the Alaska sky, the legendary 'Silent City'.

"We could plainly see houses, well-defined streets and trees", related L.B. French in an 1889 *New York Times* story datedlined Chicago, October 30. French said he and his companions, on an early July afternoon about 5 o'clock, suddenly saw a 'spectral city' appear in the sky, moving towards them above an Alaska glacier.

"Here and there rose tall spires over huge buildings which appeared to be ancient mosques or cathedrals. It was a large city, one which would contain at least 100,000 inhabitants [..] It did not look like a modern city – more like an ancient European city. I noticed particularly the immense height of the spires."

Before he and a companion could reach better vantage points to photograph the ghostly city, French said, it grew fainter and disappeared. The vision, he estimated, lasted about 25 minutes. French was neither the first nor the last to report the 'Silent City' spectacle in Alaska's great Glacier Bay, on the Alaska Panhandle about 70 miles northwest of Juneau.

A phantom city out of place and time? A beautiful, inexplicable mirage? Or a fabulous tale of Alaska folklore?

MUIR GLACIER DISCOVERED

Most sightings of the Silent City have placed it above Muir Glacier, named after John Muir, the Alaska explorer who first visited Glacier Bay in 1879. It forms part of the vast, hauntingly beautiful Glacier Bay National Monument. One of several glaciers, Muir is located in a mountain-studded sea of ice about 25 miles wide. It spills into Muir Inlet, passing between the flanks of Mount Wright and a ridge extending to Riggs Glacier about five miles to the east. A frozen Niagara about two miles wide, Muir rises some 200 feet

in the Sky

reports of the appearance of Bristol, England, over was visible each year between 21 June and 10 July

above the blue Alaska waters, plunging to a depth of 700 feet beneath. Great ice chunks continually crack off the glacier's jagged face and crash into the bay with a thunder heard for miles.

Describing his first view of the glacier to Alaska historian Alexander Badlam, Muir recalled it in terms suggesting that he, too, beheld an otherworldly metropolis:

"[I saw] a bewildering chaos of strange architectural forms, beautiful beyond the measure of description, and so bewildering in their beauty as to almost make the spectator believe that he was revelling in a dream. There were great clusters of glistening spires, gables, obelisks, monoliths and castles standing out boldly against the sky…"

RICHARD WILLOUGHBY'S PHOTOGRAPH

It was not John Muir, however, but a long-time Alaska prospector named Richard G. Willoughby who put Muir Glacier's 'Silent City' on the map. Camping in the mountains of Glacier Bay one day in the mid-1880s, Willoughby was awakened one morning by an excited Indian companion. Looking northward, Willoughby observed a strange glow in the sky above the glacier. Gradually, incredibly, the light assumed the distinct appearance of a very large city, the apparition the Indians called 'The Silent City'.

Willoughby watched agog. Nothing moved, nobody could be seen, not even a shadow dimmed the great city's radiance, as if its spectral structures glowed from within. Too soon the glorious image faded. Willoughby walked toward it, quickened his pace, but the phantom city vanished back into the sky above the glacier.

What astounding mirage was this? What unexplained refraction of light could transport to Alaska the image of an exotic city thousands of miles away? It had to be a city far distant: nothing approaching its size, or resembling its appearance, existed in the sparsely-populated North.

Willoughby learned that the mysterious apparition had been seen before above Muir Glacier. His best chance to see it, he heard, was in late June or early July, when the days were longest. He returned to Glacier Bay with a camera; he made three treks in as many years, camping out on a mountain ledge opposite the glacier. His first two vigils yielded only faint glimpses of the city and unconvincing photos. But finally, on a mild June day, the city appeared again in wondrous detail, suspended above the ice as before. Willoughby snapped his camera.

For a year or so afterwards, he circulated a glass negative among his Alaska friends, claiming it was the picture he'd taken of the mirage above Muir Glacier. In 1889 a visiting newspaperman named Miner Bruce interviewed Willoughby, obtained a print from the negative, and wrote up the story for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Other US papers picked up the story, complete with photo. The Silent City legend was born. Some found it genuinely mysterious and speculated on the peculiar light-bending properties of Alaska's atmosphere. The story stirred widespread interest, prompting Bruce to write additional Silent City articles; but some readers, noting the well-defined architecture in the photograph, the shadows and sharply-focussed trees (leafless in summer), simply chuckled.

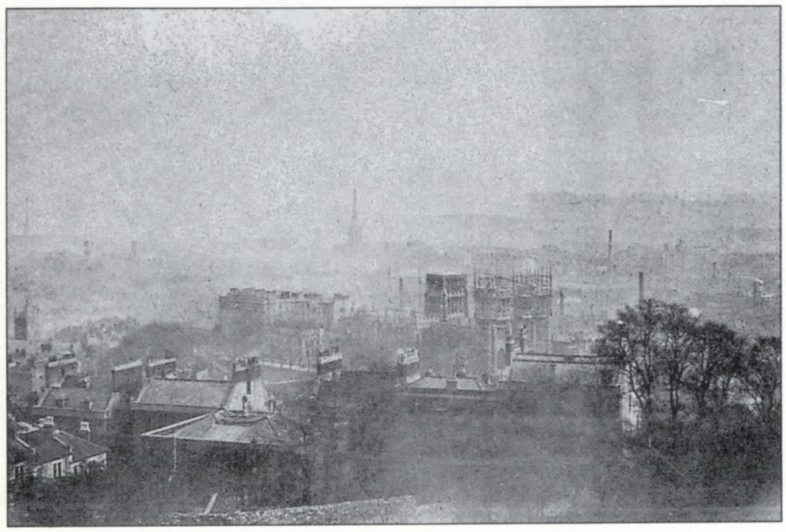
BRISTOL IN THE SKY

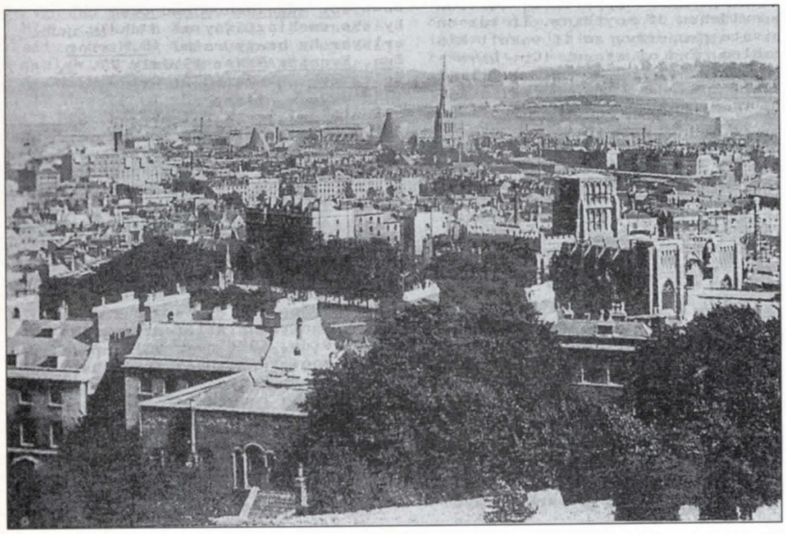
What city was it? Nobody knew immediately, but in October that year a Wells Fargo employee named W.G. Stuart spotted a copy of Willoughby's topical picture in a San Francisco store window and recognised it as a view of Bristol, England, where he had lived for a time.

"The photograph represents an old portion of the city, the view being from a public park on Brandon Hill", Stuart told the *Chronicle*. "There is a Catholic cathedral here, the main building of which was completed about two centuries ago.

LEFT: Mirage of Muir Glacier, seen from Glacier Bay, from a photograph taken on 23rd July 1889 by Miss Maud Badlam. Muir himself described the sight as "A bewildering chaos of strange architectural forms, beautiful beyond the measure of description, and so bewildering in their beauty as to almost make the spectator believe that he was revelling in a dream. There were great clusters of glistening spires, gables, obelisks, monoliths and castles standing out boldly against the sky …"

INSET: Scottish-American naturalist John Muir (1838-1914).





TOP: Professor Willoughby's silent city. "The real mystery is how Willoughby's utterly un-miragelike picture could have fooled anybody." The original caption says it was taken on 21 June 1889; other sources indicate it was taken a year or two earlier. ABOVE: One of 26 period photographs in Reece Winstone's *Bristol in the 1880s*, showing that Willoughby's famous 'mirage' picture is a view from Brandon Hill.

Just before I left Bristol, two years ago, work was being commenced on the two towers, and the scaffolding was built just as it is represented in 'The Silent City'. In the photograph alleged to be taken in Alaska is a large building to the left of the cathedral. This is the Royal Hotel. Just in front of the cathedral is a square known as College Green. The Avon River runs through the city, and the shipping is to be seen right in the heart of the city, just as it is depicted in the Alaskan photograph." *[Confirmation of this opinion by a Bristol photographic historian is discussed in* **FT24**:37 *– Eds.]*

The real mystery is how Willoughby's utterly un-miragelike picture could have fooled anybody. Yet Miner Bruce, recalling the Silent City saga in his book *Alaska – Its History and Resources* (1899) defended Willoughby: "[He] never by word or implication gave me any reason to think that his story was other than a true one." Bruce, however, openly admitted that even if he had known that the picture was a fake, he would not have exposed Willoughby, out of gratitude for the oldtimer's "interesting tale".

Bruce had good reason to be grateful: his Silent City writings, he revealed, were "the most profitable newspaper articles I ever wrote". And Willoughby, according to Bruce, made thousands of dollars selling prints of his photograph. If the image depicted Bristol, said Bruce, "it must have been reflected a distance of several thousand miles."

Alaska historian Badlam disagreed. He also knew Willoughby personally, but considered him incapable of fraud. More likely, thought Badlam, Willoughby – "as fair a sample of credulous humanity as one would meet in a lifetime" – received the plate from someone playing a practical joke on him.

Dr Charles H. Gilbert, a naturalist with an interest in human psychology, interviewed Willoughby. According to an article by David Starr Jordan, 'The Silent City of the Muir Glacier' (1897), Gilbert reported that Willoughby had known nothing about photography before attempting to photograph the Silent City. In fact, it appeared that he didn't even know the purpose of a darkroom. Willoughby claimed to have exposed the Silent City plate in daylight, where it had sat in a 'secret' chemical compound for three months!

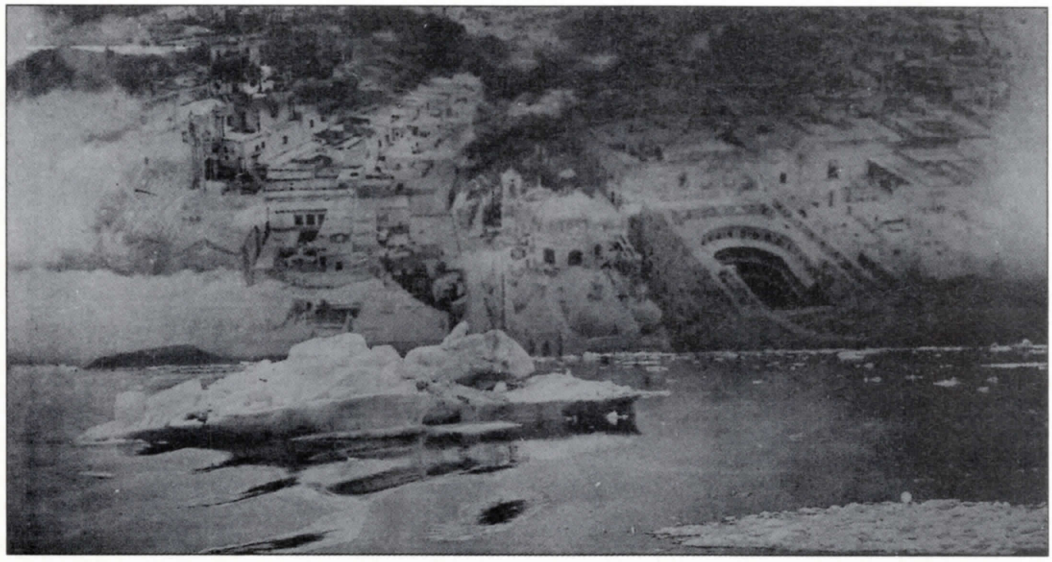
"The original negative", wrote Jordan, "examined by Dr Gilbert, was a very old, stained and faded plate, apparently a negative which had been discarded because underexposed."

OTHER WITNESSES

If the photograph was phony, the mirage itself was evidently the real thing. Two witnesses named Robert Christie and Robert Patterson claimed to have seen it on 2 July 1889 – "a city of extensive proportions, perhaps of 15,000 or 20,000 inhabitants" – and signed affidavits to that effect. Others over the years did the same. ("An affidavit in Juneau costs but a drink of whiskey", sneered David Jordan, "the usual price along the Northwest coast.")

Soon after Willoughby's photo, a second Silent City photo surfaced. It was allegedly taken in July 1889 by a photographer named I.W. Taber, using a strange technique borrowed from a Muir Glacier visitor from Nevada City, California, named James O'Dell. Using a gold pan filled with quicksilver, O'Dell claimed to be able to see in the liquid, with the aid of a magnifying glass, distant scenes reflected off the sky. In this curious way, he discovered that the Silent City mirage was actually the image of a 'Sunken City' resting on the bottom of the 700-foot deep waters of Glacier Bay.

Taber's picture, published in Badlam's *Wonders of Alaska* (1890) along with Willoughby's picture, shows an exotic-looking city with what appears to be a coliseum, a mosque and many other buildings of Old World design, all cloaked in dark clouds and mist. "I'd like to think this photograph genuine, myself", wrote Charles Fort in *New Lands* (1923), "but I do conceive that Taber could have taken it by photographing a panorama that he had painted." In any event, if a Sunken City lies at the bottom of the bay, nobody ventured to explain how its image could penetrate the deep, silt-laden waters, where surface visibility is limited to a mere foot or two.



Taber's Silent City at Glacier Bay, photographed in July 1889. Taber claimed that this city rested under 700 feet of arctic water. Fort said he wanted to believe it genuine, but suspected that it might be a photograph of a painting. Like the other two Alaskan landscapes, this photo is taken from Badlam's *Wonders of Alaska*.

KERSHON'S BURIED CITY

A prospector named George Kershon, reading about the Silent City, told the *San Francisco Examiner* what he thought the source of the strange vision could be. His account appears in Badlam's book. During the summer of 1888, Kershon and an Indian guide, exploring deep in the Alaska interior, climbed a hilltop and stumbled upon a strange sight in the distant valley below: a city frozen in ice.

"After several hours of hard work, I reached the outskirts of this mysterious city", reported Kershon, "and found that the place was laid out in streets, with blocks of strange-looking buildings, what appeared to be mosques, towers, ports etc., and every evidence of having been built by art.

"The whole was not of solid ice, though it seemed to be, but blows from a hatchet on one of the walls disclosed the fact that beneath this barrier of ice was some sort of building material. It looked to be wood, but of a stone-like hardness and apparently petrified. The silence around the place was something ghostly…

"I soon got tired of investigating the city, as the streets were blocked in many places by huge masses of ice, rendering passage almost impossible. The Indian, too, became uneasy, and we started on the return trip, reaching home the next day, tired but satisfied that we had been the first men to gaze on that silent city for centuries."

The Muir Glacier mirage, Kershon claimed, must have been the reflected image of the frozen city he had found. How such a city came to be in the far North, he couldn't say. "Perhaps at one time it was not so cold north as it is now", he speculated.

A GREAT MIRAGE

All three candidates for the Silent City mirage – Bristol, a sunken city in the bay and a frozen lost city further north – "will rank high among Baron Munchausen's fairy tales", predicted Alexander Badlam. He, too, saw 'a great mirage' over the ice while sailing on Glacier Bay aboard the steamship *Ancon*, 23 July 1889. There was "what seemed to be a block of large white buildings [..] Beautifully formed spires, apparently three or four hundred feet high, reached above the buildings. The doors, windows, streets and gardens appeared to be visible, but this mirage was like those of the great desert."

A photo of what he saw appears in *Wonders of Alaska*, showing the prolific spires and monoliths so often described in accounts of the Silent City. Clearly, Badlam, Willoughby and others viewed Muir Glacier during temperature inversions, when a layer of warm air hung above the jagged face and crown of the cold glacier. Light from the ice, striking the warm air above, would be reflected back down, causing the ice to appear to loom in marvellously elongated pinnacles and other fantastic shapes.

"Mirages in the glacier regions are of frequent occurrence in pleasant weather", wrote Badlam, "and as the sun does not set before nine o'clock during June and July, some charming views are obtained at or about that hour." French's sighting, in fact, was of a 'Silent City' above a glacier near Mount Fairweather, more that 20 miles northwest of Muir.

Since the turn of the century, Muir Glacier has been steadily receding about a quarter of a mile a year. Today, it is roughly 20 miles north of where it was in the 1880s, and the Silent City mirage is apparently no longer sighted. According to Alaska historian R.T. DeArmand (in a note of 30 Sept 1990), no "geologists, glaciologists, fishermen, kayakers and hundreds of other visitors over the years" have reported the fabled city in the sky. Has the shrinking glacier taken the Silent City mirage with it? Or is something more precious – our capacity to experience imaginative wonder – disappearing instead?

Willoughby's photograph, and the yarns it inspired, are Alaska's finest contribution to the honourable American tradition of leg-pulling. Yet there is no denying the icy spires of the Silent City must have been a spellbinding sight. Who can be sure they won't appear again some day? After all, the Alaska sky where the Northern Lights reel is indisputably a realm of the marvellous. FT

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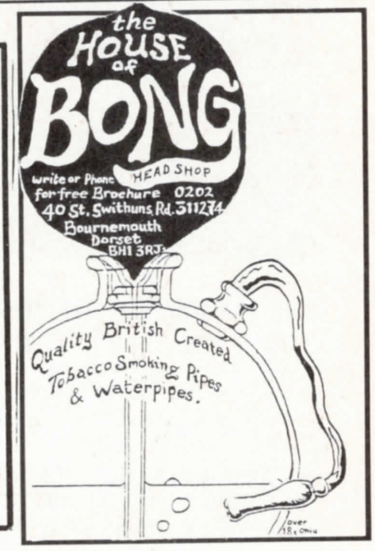
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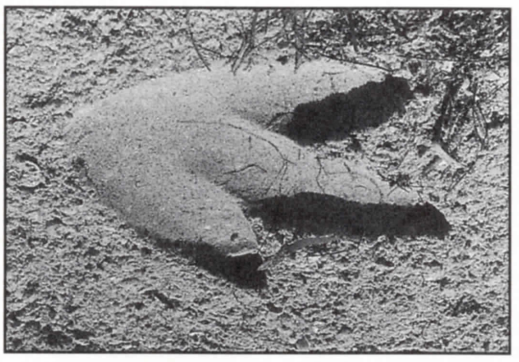
Florida's Penguin Panic

In 1948, inspired by fossil dinosaur tracks, a pair of Florida jokers created a scare on a Florida beach that made headlines for the rest of the year. **BOB RICKARD** chronicles the event, and examines the prominent role played by Ivan Sanderson, one of the founders of cryptozoology (the study of undiscovered animals).



Early one morning in February 1948, a resident of Clearwater, Florida, strolling along a sandy beach, noticed a track of large, curiously-shaped footprints. They came out of the sea, appeared to fail to negotiate a four-foot sandbank, and wandered for more than two miles before returning to the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The sand was soft and held good impressions ... the damned things had three 'toes' and were about 14 inches long and 11 inches across.

THREE-TOED TERROR

Police were called from the Pinellas County Sheriff's Department, and they shook their heads. There was a story that a young couple had their night at the beach disrupted by the sight of a huge monster coming out of the sea, and that they had begged the police for a rifle so they could pursue it. The beach was swept clean (whether by the tide or by police is not said). When daylight revealed new tracks, and the story spread, and most of Clearwater had been to the beach to see for themselves, there was a state of near-hysteria.

There were more reports ... 6 March: 100 yards of similar prints a mile and a half to the north – 20 March: tracks on Dan's Island to the south – 3 April (Oh-oh! it's that month again!): 350 yards of track at Indian Rocks, 10 miles to the south – 8 April: a mile of tracks south of Indian Rocks. Then no sign until October when 200 yards of the distinctive three-toed prints were found at Suwannee Gables, 40 miles up the Suwannee River.

GREAT WHITE HUNTER

The scene was set for an 'expert' to make an entrance; he was none other than Ivan T. Sanderson, an expatriot English zoologist who had made a career of exploring remote regions and bringing back specimens for zoos, universities and museums. Sanderson had settled in New England, written prolifically on Fortean aspects of zoology and founded a Fortean organisation (Society for the Investigation of the Unexplained). He heard of the Florida tracks while working on a regular wildlife spot on radio for WNBC, New York, and managed to convince them to send him south on assignment.

Sanderson arrived at Suwannee Gables on 4 November and was publicised studying the deteriorating tracks like an incarnation of Sherlock Holmes. He returned to New York 12 days later having discovered witnesses who admitted seeing the creature itself. (His investigations were reported in *Fate* Dec 1967 and Jan 1968, and in his book *More Things*, Pyramid Books, NY, 1969.) The first sighting occurred the day before the Clearwater beach advent, when two professional fishermen claimed to have seen the creature sporting among shoreline waves at Big Pass.

Sanderson also spoke to two pilots from the Dunedin Flying School who had reported seeing a strange animal swimming off Hog Island on 25 July. They described it as about 15 feet long, with a "very hairy body, a heavy blunt head and back legs like an alligator." It's tail was "long and blunt". The plane returned to base and picked up two other men; together they located the creature again, observing it well during six passes over it. A Wisconsin couple, on a fishing holiday to Florida that August, were startled on one of the many uninhabited islands off Tarpon Springs,

ABOVE: One of the foot-wide prints allegedly made by a giant penguin.
RIGHT: Cryptozoologist Ivan Sanderson, who flew down from New York to hunt the monster, studies a plaster cast of the huge tracks.

when a large, unidentifiable creature waddled out of bushes and down to the ocean. Their description included "short, thick legs and huge feet [..] no neck [..] covered with short thick grey fur [..]," and arms like "flippers".

Almost by chance, Sanderson himself saw the beast. On a plane, halfway between Suwannee Gables and the sea, he looked out to spot "an enormous dirty-yellow creature [..] 20 feet long and eight feet wide [..] wallowing on the surface," but it was startled and could not be seen again. "It was one of only two monsters I have ever seen and I won't forget it," he said later.

RED TIDE VICTIM

Before long Sanderson had it figured. His initial reservations about some clues gave way to his reasoned conviction that here was a large, unknown creature like a giant penguin. He imagined it had been dislodged from its usual habitat by a natural catastrophe (he blamed a 'red tide' or explosion of plankton that occurred off Florida at the beginning of 1948), and wandered around, hopelessly lost. He had agonised over 'awkward' details, such as the prints only being made at night, or the man-sized stride, or the apparently jointless flat-bottomed foot, or that they were "too perfect".

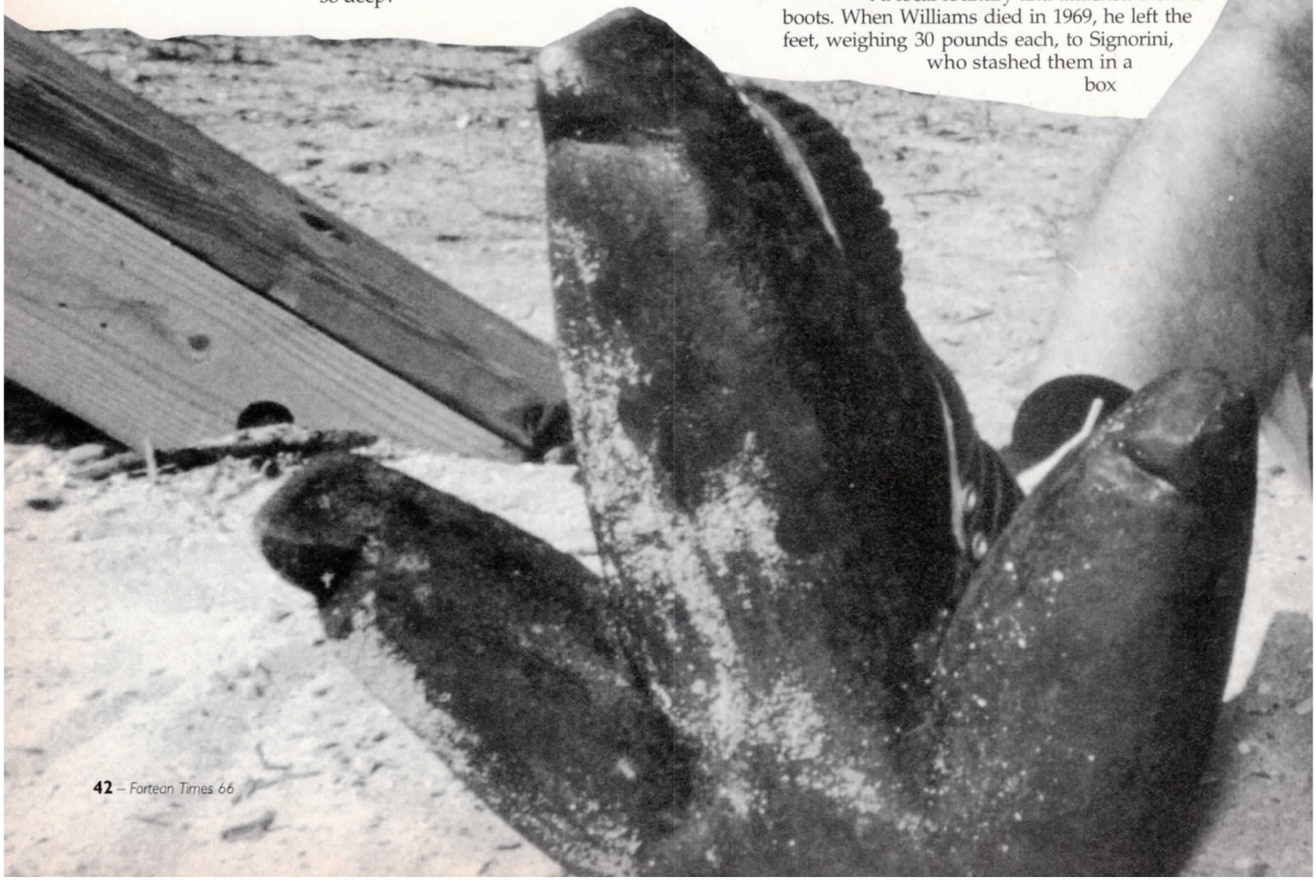
The Sheriff's Department were convinced it was all a prank, "one of the most masterful ever perpetrated" in the region. Sanderson objected: how, he asked, could a man on stilts walk so far over soft sand, stamping impressions so deep?

What we find astonishing is that Sanderson seems to have been unperturbed by contradictory details in the witnesses' descriptions, including his own. He saw dirty-yellow where others saw grey or black. The fliers saw a thing like a hairy alligator; the thing seen by the Wisconsin couple had a "head like a rhinoceros"; several fishermen on the Suwannee River spoke of "domed" and "log-shaped" objects swimming upstream. Nevertheless, his penguin solution fitted the Wisconsin couple's description perfectly, he said, and a swimming penguin's feet, held stiffly behind it, might have seemed like a short stubby tail from the air.

THE HOAXERS CONFESS

So the story hung, unresolved, until 11 June 1988, when an exposé appeared in the St Petersburg *Times*. Reporter Jan Kirby was contacted by Tony Signorini, who confessed that he and his friend Al Williams began it all 40 years previously. Williams was a notorious prankster, and was well known to the Clearwater police. Frank Daniels, who retired in 1981 after 13 years as chief of police, told Kirby: "We suspected Williams because he usually called in with reports of the monster [..] but we could never prove it."

Williams and Signorini, partners in an auto business, were inspired by pictures of fossilised dinosaur tracks, found about six months earlier in New Mexico. Their experiments with concrete feet were unsatisfactory, so they had heavier iron feet cast at a local foundry and attached them to boots. When Williams died in 1969, he left the feet, weighing 30 pounds each, to Signorini, who stashed them in a box



40 years after the giant penguin's debut, Tony Signorini displays the concrete three-toed boots used to create the scare.

under a bench in their workshop. There they stayed until he retrieved them for Jan Kirby [see photo]. Signorini explained how they worked: "I would just swing my leg back and forth like this and give a big hop. The weight of the feet would carry me [about six feet]. They were heavy enough to sink down in the sand."

Signorini had confided to friends, as long ago as 1965, how he and Williams had made the tracks. They would wait for nights when the waves were small and few people around. "I'd put the shoes on in the water and then walk a long way up the beach, maybe two miles, and then get back in the boat. [..] Other times we would take the feet in the car and carry them to where we wanted to make the tracks. Then we'd take a palm frond and brush away all the footprints we'd made," said Signorini.

PUZZLE REMAINS

Sanderson died in 1973, probably without knowing he had been duped; but a number of writers on cryptozoology have included the Florida giant penguin in their catalogues of mysteries on the basis of Sanderson's convictions. In this case, it was the attention of a media star 'expert' that kickstarted a local joke to the level of enduring legend. Over succeeding years, the 'giant three-toed penguin' became a solid part of Florida's folklore, and there were, subsequently, many clumsy attempts to fake more tracks for fun, fame or tourism.

We are left with one puzzle … If the tracks were faked, how do we account for the sightings of the unidentified large swimming thing out to sea, including Sanderson's own glimpse of it? Sanderson was an experienced observer of animals, and was, by some accounts, reliable and honest. According to others, however, Sanderson the storyteller was not above exaggeration for effect if it would help his gist.

But if you cannot accept that every witness was lying, the appearance of the strange sea creature in the midst of the tracks hoax must rank as one of those monumental coincidences that Charles Fort himself had noted about similar 'flaps' over unidentified animals in earlier decades. If so, the real joke was on believers and sceptics alike.

BYE-GONES

Extracts from *The Oswestry Advertizer*'s eponymous weekly column that ran from 1871 to 1939, selected by RICHARD HOLLAND, author of *Haunted Clwyd* and *Supernatural Clwyd*, and sub-editor at North Wales Newspapers, who still publish *The Oswestry Advertizer*.

OCT 9, 1901

PARTRIDGE LORE

The following extract from Hulbert's works *[European Museum* p265] is communicated by 'William E.A. Axon' to *Notes and Queries* for Sept 7, 1901, with the remark, "I have not met with this bit of partridge lore elsewhere":-

"In the year 1811, the editor of this work resided in Coleham, a suburb of Shrewsbury, and equally populous with the town itself. One evening in the latter end of the year, John Jenkins (a neighbour and tenant) brought him a fine partridge alive, which he said had flown into his house and taken shelter under a chest of drawers; he had caught it, and begged his landlord's acceptance of it; at the same time, Jenkins remarked that he was very much alarmed by the circumstance, as he had heard his parents relate that a partridge found its way in a similar manner into their dwelling, and that shortly after a brother of his came to an untimely end.

"The editor endeavoured to calm the fears of the poor fellow by representing to him the absurdity of his apprehensions, it being impossible that such circumstances should have any connection with or influence on each other. The bird was accepted; and in order to tame and to preserve it alive it was turned into a large corn warehouse, then part of the cotton manufactory, where it remained for nearly a month, when one evening it burst through a glass window, breaking the panes with its violence against them, and escaped; and what is most singular, this occurred at the very moment Jenkins's child was on fire, and finally burnt to death.

The editor assisted in having the unfortunate child conveyed to the Salop Infirmary, where it expired, Jenkins sitting by its side and exclaiming against the poor bird as the cause rather than the prognosticator of the catastrophe. The circumstances are singular, but whether purely accidental or governed by some particular providence, cannot easily be determined; suppose the latter, the bird came to warn Jenkins and to stimulate him and his family to care and watchfulness against accident or danger; and having performed its mission, returned to its native liberty and fields."

FEB 5, 1902

GHOSTLY OMEN

The late Mr William Davies, building contractor, of Marford, near Wrexham, who died at the age of 91 in 1874, was one of the old type, with his swallow-tailed coat, breeches and leggings, and silk hat, which fashion he followed up to the end. The old gentleman, who was noted as a pedestrian, often related this strange incident. While walking late one evening with Mr Williams, of The Old Parsonage, Gresford, at the bottom of Little Acton Hill, near the Blue Bell (then a public house), they met a lady dressed all in white. Mr Davies said to Mr Williams - "Now you will catch it; here is Mrs Williams coming to meet you", and the figure vanished in the darkness. Strange to say, on the arrival of Mr Williams at The Old Parsonage, Mrs Williams was found hanging by the neck, quite dead.

MAR 8, 1905

MYSTERY LIGHTS

In the 'Mirror' of 28 Aug 1830, appears the following:

"In a wild and retired district in North Wales, that namely which extends westwards from Dolgelly [Dolgellau] to Barmouth and Towyn [Tywyn - all on the west Gwynedd coast], where there is certainly as much superstition as in any other district of the same extent, and where there are many individuals who lay claim to the title and capabilities of seers, the following occurrences took place, to the great astonishment of the mountaineers. We can vouch for the truth of the statement, as many members of our own teulu, or class, were witness of the fact.

"One dark evening, a few winters ago, some persons with whom we are well acquainted, were returning to Barmouth on the south or opposite side of the river; as they approached the ferry-house at Penthryn, which is directly opposite Barmouth, they observed a light near the house, which they conjectured to be a bon-fire, and greatly puzzled were they to discover the reason why it should have been lighted. As they came nearer, however, it vanished, and when they inquired at the house respecting it, they were surprised to learn that not only had the people there displayed no light, but they had not even seen one, nor could they perceive any signs of it on the sands. On reaching Barmouth, the circumstances were mentioned, and the fact corroborated by some of the people there, who had also plainly and distinctly seen the light. It was settled, therefore, by some of the old fishermen, that this was a 'death-token', and sure enough the man who kept the ferry at the time was drowned at high-water a few nights afterwards on the very spot where the light was seen. He was landing from the boat, when he fell into the water and so perished.

"The same winter, the Barmouth people as well as the inhabitants of the opposite banks, were struck by the appearance of a number of small lights which were seen dancing in the air. At a place called Borthwyn, about half a mile from the town, a great number of people came out to see the lights; and after a while they all but one disappeared, and this one proceeded slowly towards the water's edge, to a little bay where some boats were moored. The men in a sloop, which was anchored near, saw the light advancing - they also saw it hover for a few seconds over one particular boat, and then totally disappear. Two or three days afterwards, the man to whom that particular boat belonged was drowned in the river while he was sailing about Barmouth in that very boat. We have narrated these facts just as they occurred; we must leave the solution of the mystery to the ingenuity of our readers."

MAGNETIC MIASMAS

PAUL SIEVEKING looks at illnesses blamed on electromagnetic fields

In 1987, Teresa and Joseph Kennedy moved to a house in Bournemouth, Dorset, 300 feet from a 150-foot radio mast used by the West Hampshire Water Board to co-ordinate vans. In the following months, their two-year-old daughter Jamie attacked her 18-year-old sister with a poker, threw a fit in a church, hurled herself at doors and stabbed herself with pens. For three years, she slept no more than two hours a night. Said her mother: "She would hear voices and ringing in her head. If she ate certain things she would be up all night screaming and running round her room. She would try to climb out of the windows. It was as though she had the devil inside her."

Harley Street physician George Lewith suggested the radio mast might be to blame and electro-magnetic researcher Roger Cogshill, from Reading University, visited the house and confirmed that there was a powerful electro-magnetic field (EMF) running through the little girl's bedroom. By April 1990, Jamie was recovering from her electro-magnetic 'possession'. Her room had been insulated from the rays and the water board had realigned the radio mast, though it denied any responsibility for the troubles of the Kennedy family. *D.Mail, D.Star, 12 April 1992.*

DAVID MERRETT'S LETHAL LAMP

Last February, Roger Cogshill was able to diagnose another EMF problem in Bournemouth. David Merrett appeared to have aged 30 years since he moved to his bungalow there in 1986. He also lost two stone in weight and suffered from chronic insomnia. The cause of his string of complaints eluded the best efforts of five doctors. Mr Merrett had suspected that a radio mast in the garden of a neighbouring 'ham' might be to blame, but Mr Cogshill traced the problem to a lamp hanging over the dining room table where Mr Merrett spent an average of four hours a day working as a graphic artist.

"The extremely high energy field over the table was entirely due to the unusual design of the lamp," said Mr Cogshill. "Its switch was operable under the actual lamp glass and in consequence the circuit was subject to alternating current flow."

The artist's head was chronically subjected to ten times the normal domestic levels of EMF, as was all the food and drink left on the table.

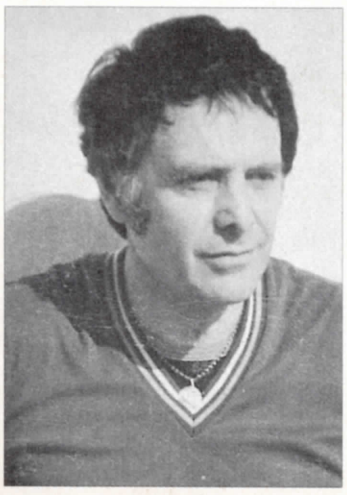
Mr Cogshill further discovered that an EMF of 70-90 volts per metre pervaded the house above five feet six inches, which could account for the fact that 6ft 2ins Mr Merrett was so badly affected while his wife Rayella, 5ft 2ins, remained perfectly healthy. The EMF originated entirely with the domestic wiring, since switching off the mains supply collapsed the field entirely. *Bournemouth Echo, 26 Feb; Sun, D.Record, 27 Feb 1992.*

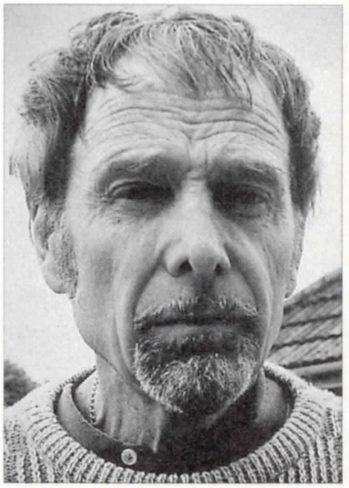
X-RAY VISION

In September 1991, Dianna McPheat, 37, from Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, filed a formal complaint against Pennsylvania Power & Light Co (PP&L), claiming that a 500-kilovolt power line near her house had given her X-ray vision, enhanced hearing, and caused her plants to grow in spirals. She said appliances would start without being turned on and she could hear voices from the telephone without picking it up. Her four children (aged 14, 12, 10 and 3) frequently suffered nose bleeds at the same time and she had three week-long headaches while she lived at the house from June 1990 to May 1991.

Other alleged problems included chest pains, sleeping disorders, memory loss and general disorientation. Mrs McPheat first contacted the power company when her bathroom light stayed on after the switch was turned off. Her children would play with long fluorescent bulbs, which glowed light space age swords under the power line.

PP&L filed a motion to dismiss the complaint because, they said, there was no definitive evidence that EMFs were harmful. In any case, extensive testing at the five acre property by PP&L and other agencies showed 'normal' EMF levels. A judge allowed Mrs McPheat a full hearing before the Public Utility Commission, which started in March this year. She wanted to force PP&L to admit the problem and construct a shield to protect her house. *[AP] 4 Mar 1992.*





ABOVE: Jamie Kennedy with her mother Teresa in front of the radio mast blamed for driving her crazy
LEFT: David Merrett in 1985 before he moved into the Bournemouth bungalow ... RIGHT: And seven years later, in 1992, prematurely aged by electro-magnetic pollution

SATANIC CHILD

In this latest instalment of our occasional reports about a sinister

On 11 April 1992, police from the town of Guaratuba, in Brazil's southern state of Paraná, found the mutilated body of a boy in a field near a sawmill. Detective Joao Arnaldo Hobmeir said the boy's ears, hands and genitals had been cut off, and his heart, liver and intestines were missing. He was identified as Evandro Ramos Caetano, aged seven (some sources say six), who was reported missing five days earlier, and it was evident that he had been murdered in a ritualistic fashion.

As Roman Catholic congregations have declined, in Brazil as in the world over, the Afro-Brazilian spirit cults of Candomble and Umbanda have sustained their widespread membership. However, the gods of these popular cults are, mostly, paganised versions of Catholic saints, and devil worship or human sacrifice do not figure in their rituals. After two months fruitless inquiries among known cult officials (*pai de santos*), the lead the police sought was provided by Oswaldo Marcineiro, an elder of the normally non-violent Umbanda. He confessed that he and two assistants had taken part in the murder as a bit of private enterprise.

> "His heart was offered to the devil and his blood mixed with sawdust and thrown into the sea."

SACRIFICE

Marcineiro's notebook implicated Aldo Abagge, the town's mayor and owner of the sawmill, and revealed that the sacrifice had been commissioned, for $3,000 (some sources say $2,000), by the mayor's wife Celina, 53, and daughter Beatriz, 28, to secure Aldo's re-election in the coming October polls. The mayor went into hiding as his wife and daughter, and five other cult members, were arrested. Celina, who administered the town's day-care centres and grade schools, confessed that she had used her position to select the boy and lured him with candy.

Beatriz and Celina both confessed to taking part in the killing and disembowelling of the boy, saying his heart was offered to the devil and his blood mixed with sawdust and thrown into the sea. Later, when Aldo surrendered to the police and was charged with aiding and abetting the crime, his wife and daughter retracted their confessions. A warrant was also issued for the arrest of José Taruggi and his wife Valentina de Andrade, Argentinean socialites and prominent Umbanda leaders, after they were implicated by Marcineiro and "an image of the devil" was found at their home.

We have no further news of the trial, but the case seems to be only the tip of the misfortunes of this seaside resort, 700 miles (some sources say 520 miles) south of Rio de Janeiro. Guaratuba's police are disturbed by Marcineiro's admission that he, and two of the arrested, kidnapped and killed another boy, Leandro Bossi, aged seven, who disappeared from the town on 15 February. According to Marcineiro, the group's plan was to sacrifice seven blond children, aged seven, who had seven letters in their names, before the October elections. Evandro's murder was on the seventh of April and involved seven people, police believe. With some foreboding, the disappearances of ten children, aged between two and 11, since 1987, are being re-examined.

Sources: *[R] 11 July; Guardian, Edinburgh Eve.News 15 July; [AP] 16+17 July; Time, 10 Aug 1992.*

Celina Cordeiro Abagge (left), wife of the mayor of Guaratuba, Brazil, and daughter Beatriz, accused of commissioning a Satanic murder to improve their family's sagging fortunes.

MORE BODY BUSINESS

In Paul Sieveking's review of the modern trade in purloined organs last issue – 'Kidney Kidnappers' ***FT65:50*** – he closed with a note on the activities of hospital security guards in Barranquilla, Colombia, who mugged and killed the denizens of skid row and sold their bodies to the medical school.

Just a month later, Colombian police smashed a gang that raided cemeteries to supply fresh (?) human remains to the witches and black magicians who are widely consulted by a majority of Colombians. In a house in Bogota, said Col Luis (AP calls him Enrique) Montenegro, commander of the judicial police, 45 skulls and boxes of other bones were found. They were believed to be the remains of people who had died not less than 18 months previously, and exhumed in the town of Cartago, in western Colombia.

The actual origin of the relics, how they died and their identities, are now difficult to determine. Two of the skulls sported bullet-holes, and the supplier – José Ocampo, a warlock in the southwestern city of Cali, home of cocaine barons – was recently murdered along with his wife. Col Montenegro's guess was that Ocampo was in the throes of setting up a "witches' house", similar to one already established in Cali, before he was killed. *[R] 22+23 April; [AP] 23 April 1992.*

In relation to this

ABUSE UPDATE

world-wide phenomenon, BOB RICKARD focuses on South America

report's territory, I must relate a variation of the baby kidnapping stories that we at *FT* have not heard for some time – babies kidnapped from their mothers' wombs. Isabel da Silva Santos, aged 42 and just days away from having her baby, has told Rio de Janeiro police that she was snatched off a street by three men, blindfolded and driven to a Rio clinic where her labour was induced. She remembers hearing her baby cry and people speaking with a foreign accent, but was kept hooded throughout the ordeal. Later she was dumped on a quiet street and given her taxi fare home.

During her kidnap, one of Mrs Santos' abductors phoned her mother-in-law, with whom she was staying, to say, allegedly: "We have Isabel and she won't be hurt. We only want the baby because we need six and only have two." Given the active Brazilian lore about stolen organs and the usual choice of alleged culprits - ie. witchcraft or modern versions of Burke and Hare serving the transplant and medical research industries - we note the arrival of a third option, international baby smuggling rings. Federal police here reckon around 1,500 babies a year are bought or kidnapped from local mothers, of which about 80% are sold in Italy and France, and the rest in USA, Israel, Belgium, Holland, Sweden and Germany. *D.Express, 30 March 1992.*

Brazilian police claim – in this *D.Express* report by Nicholas Buckley – to have smashed a baby trafficking network in January in the city of Curitiba; and before that a flourishing trade in children's organs for transplanting was exposed with the help of information from an Italian judge. A spokesman for the Federal police in Rio is quoted, saying: "In many cases the lives of the babies are ended when unscrupulous surgeons remove their vital organs [..] which fetch prices of up to £40,000." In contrast, the kidnapping of induced babies or fœtuses also features prominently in the British and American scare-stories about so-called 'brood-mares' - female sex slaves kept almost permanently pregnant by Satanic cults as a production line of unbaptised infants for unspeakable sacrifices - but none of them have stood up to investigation or forensic scrutiny.

SERIAL MENACE

Against this nightmare background there stalks the additional danger of the solitary psychopathic hunter. Due to a quirk in Ecuador law, the worst serial killer in modern history has probably been released from jail in Quito by now, after serving 11 years. Pedro Lopez was called 'the Monster of the Andes' when he was finally caught in 1980; in three years he had raped and strangled over 350 girls, aged between nine and 12, in Ecuador, Peru and Colombia - a terrifying statistic which overshadows even the 55 cannibalistic murders of Russia's latest monster, Andrei Chikatilo. Parents, who have seen no sign of remorse from Lopez, have promised his freedom will be short-lived. Two other serial killers are active in Ecuador right now: one has murdered 11 taxi-drivers in Quito, and the other nine transvestites. *Bangkok Post 12 April 1992.*

Part of the haul of human bones found in a Bogota 'witch house' in April.

THE SPECTRAL INSPECTORATE

BOB RICKARD updates our watch on Bogus Social Workers

Bogus Social Workers operate singly or in groups of two or three, and can be of either sex. Are the females attempting to procure children for the males, or are they acting under their own weird compulsions? They are uncatchable and seem to have a lot of nerve. The risks they take – even continuing their visits in the midst of general alerts – seem out of all proportion to their rewards. Thankfully, most incidents come to nothing, but, as you'll read, there are other times when childen are taken away and brought back apparently unharmed.

It seems quite sinister, to us, that BSWs can appear so normal, conforming, almost like psychical chameleons, to their victims' notions about local Social Service officers. Like the enigmatic Men-in-Black of UFO fame, the BSWs are sometimes quite ignorant about those they have called to see; yet, at other times, they seem to know intimate details of cases. In these latter instances, it is as though they are working on insider information; could they have infiltrated local departments, or perfected hacking into SS computer files?

As if all this confusion wasn't enough, there are signs the phenomenon has already become a part of popular culture. Around mid-year there was a full-scale BSW scare in Falkirk, Scotland. It was sparked off when a depressed father of two claimed that bogus social workers had tried to snatch his children. He later confessed that he had hatched the story in a desperate attempt to have his family rehoused. He was sent for psychiatric and SS reports. (Alas, the clipping is unreferenced.) Here, then, is our gazetteer of 1992 BSW cases …

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

■ February-March – A smartly-dressed woman, who said she was a social worker from the NSPCC called Valerie, told a Milton Keynes mother that her mentally-handicapped child, who was in care at the time, had died of a heart attack. When the mother's distress upset her other son, aged three, the visitor gave the boy sweets from her handbag and promised to return.

The well-spoken BSW returned to the grieving parents two days later, during which period they had broken the news to relatives and begun arrangements for a funeral. This time she threatened to take away her three-year-old son, saying she was "worried about his welfare". Angry about this unfeeling treatment, the mother phoned the local SS office to complain, only to learn that her child was not dead and that 'Valerie' was a bogus official. The mother later said: "I've had enough dealings with social workers and she had me totally convinced. She looked and talked like one, and knew everything about our case", even that the handicapped boy was being fostered in Cambridgeshire.

Bucks police revealed that the same woman – driving a dark blue car – has struck twice since then. A few days after the cruel hoax, she called on a family (who were not on any SS register) and threatened to take away their two-year-old son. Shortly after that, the BSW offered to take another family's two-year-old daughter for a walk to give the mother a break. In each case, when asked for identification, the woman said she would return to her office for it; and when the woman never returned the families would check with the local SS office to be told they had sent no one. *Milton Keynes Gazette, 13 Feb + 12 March; Milton Keynes Citizen, 13 Feb 1992.*

■ September – Milton Keynes – male and female BSWs visit Janet Shapely, saying they had complaints that her child was badly treated – Janet refuses to let them in because they did not know the name of her child and had no ID cards. *Today, 4 Sept 1992.*

COUNTY DURHAM

■ 6 Sept - Spennymoor – The Watsons went out, leaving their one-year-old son Kristian in the care of 13-year-old Nicola Wilkinson. A woman called, claiming to be a social worker. Nicola said: "There was no way I was going to let her in. She stood outside the door for a while and then walked right past me. I couldn't stop her; she was a lot bigger than me."

The woman, aged 30-35, went straight to Kristian's bedroom and picked him up, saying she was going to take him for a drive in her car. Nicola had the quick wits to grab the boy back and shield him from the woman's attempts to get hold of him again. "I was frightened and Kristian was scared as well. I just hung on to him as tight as I could," said Nicola. The BSW left, but returned a few minutes later, and could be heard rummaging around the kitchen claiming to be checking that the baby had enough food.

Det Con Ian Ferguson of the Durham Police praised Nicola for her brave action during a frightening situation, and warned parents to be on their guard. Kristian's mother, Ena, publicly expressed her gratitude to Nicola: "She definitely saved my baby from being taken by this woman." *D.Telegraph, 8 Sept 1992.*

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

■ 24 Aug – Brockworth – well-spoken smartly-dressed BSW says she had come to give the children a check-up – knew names of the three children –

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
POSTGRADUATE TRAINING
IN CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
APPLICATIONS INVITED FOR THE FOURTH INTAKE

Not quite the meaning intended.
Course advertised in *The Guardian*, May 1991.

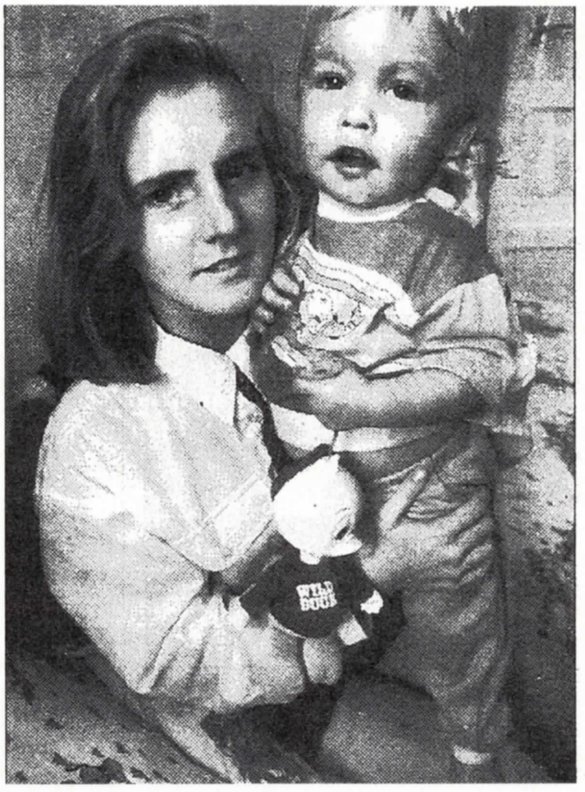
mother grew suspicious and phoned her regular health visitor – BSW drives off in a red hatchback car. *Gloucester Independent, 27 Aug 1992.*

LONDON

■ 25 June – Colindale – two male and one female BSWs say they had received complaints about cruelty towards a baby over the last eight months – mother became suspicious because her daughter was only six months old – she slams door and calls police – BSWs drive off in a black Fiat Uno. *D.Mirror, Guardian, 27 June 1992.*

■ 26 June – Pinner – same gang, or one uncannily like it – two men and a woman call – tell a mother they have reports of her beating her two children and had come to take them into care – mother resists – BSWs leave in a black hatchback car. *Harrow Borough Recorder, 2 July 1992.*

■ Mid-October – Plaistow, East London – male BSW with convincing NSPCC ID – accuses mother of beating nine-month-old baby – she undresses it to show there is no bruising – BSW asks to hold baby leaves when mother refuses. *Newham Recorder, 22 Oct 1992.*



Nicola Wilkinson – here with baby Kristian Watson – successfully fended off a BSW in Spennymoor, Co Durham in September.

OXFORDSHIRE

■ January - Headington – Smartly dressed slim woman, in late 20s, straight brown hair, claimed to be from the local health centre, asks to see two small children – flees when asked for identification. *D.Telegraph, 8 Jan 1992.*

■ February – Carterton, near Witney – BSW says she had an order to take the children into care – flees. *BBC TV local news, 27 Feb 1992.*

SCOTLAND

■ June – Tranent, East Lothian – male and female BSWs pose as social workers investigating a claim she had beaten them with a belt – convince mother to hand over her two children to them – they had seemingly genuine ID cards from SS office in nearby Haddington and "seemed to know everything about my family" – the girl, four, and her brother, three, were returned unharmed 45 minutes later; apparently they had been taken to a local park and bought ice creams – BSWs drive off in red car – imposture only discovered when the mother phoned local SS department to find out about results of the 'tests'. *D.Record, Edinburgh Eve.News, 19 June 1992.*

■ 15 July – Rosewall in Midlothian, not far from previous case above – "petite conwoman with distinctive permed hair" calls at midday – asked to see a young mother's 19-month-old baby – knows child's name and family details – left when asked to show ID. *D.Record, Edinburgh Eve.News, 16 July 1992.*

SUFFOLK

■ 13 Feb – Whepstead – BSW asks to examine baby, unaware that real health visitor had called two days before – flees when challenged to produce ID. *Bury Free Press, 14 Feb 1992.*

SURREY

■ June – St Helier estate, Sutton – pair of BSWs tricked their way into a home and examine two children. *Sutton Borough Guardian, 25 June 1992.*

TYNESIDE

■ 18 Sept – Cowgate, Newcastle – male BSW with Liverpool accent – when asked for credentials he fled to red Vauxhall Cavalier driven by a woman – there was a child in a safety seat in the back.

This report – in Newcastle *Eve.Chronicle* (19 Sept 1992) – draws attention to the frequency of the red car detail – refers to 13 reports of attempted abductions in the last year, "many involving a red car", including three incidents in the first two weeks of September in the Peterlee area.

WILTSHIRE

■ 21 July – Amesbury – woman returns home from shopping with her two-and-a-half-year-old son – man waiting on doorstep says he works for the local social services department and is investigating allegation that the boy had been sexually abused – allows him inside to examine boy's genitals - BSW warns of follow-up visit – leaves in dark blue four-door saloon car – imposture discovered two weeks later when mother inquires at local SS office about promised visit. *Independent, Southampton Eve.Echo, 12 Aug 1992.*

WORCESTERSHIRE

■ 19 Aug - Kidderminster – Three men using false IDs, posing as a doctor, a policeman and a social worker – bogus doctor, wearing a long white coat, examined two-year-old twin boys – all three leave hurriedly when one twin has asthma attack – police say this was third incident in the county in a week. *Edinburgh Eve.News, 20 Aug, D.Telegraph, 21 Aug 1992.*

AND IN THE USA

Lest anyone think this is a particularly British phenomenon...

■ Council Bluff, Indiana – male and female BSWs check two children for bruises – neither child harmed, but the BSWs boasted of power to take children away. *Des Moines (IA) Register, 30 April 1992.*

■ New Jersey – pair of female bogus 'state caseworkers' active in southern counties of Camden, Gloucester and Burlington, in May. Familiar MO – false IDs and claiming to be investing reports of child abuse. In one incident, the pair stripped a three-year-old girl, claiming to be looking for bruises. Her mother said: "They acted very official; they asked all the right questions." They left, warning they could return to remove the child if they received any more reports. *Philadelphia Inquirer, 4 June; Newark (NJ) Star Ledger, 6 June 1992.*

[For our last round-up of BSWs, see **FT57:43** *]*

DIARY OF A MAD PLANET
AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 1992

This diary aims to record, in two-month segments, the geo-physical highlights of our planet: the tempests and tantrums, the oddities and extremities. Compiled by the editors and various correspondents.

EARTH

19 Aug – quake in Kirghizstan, central Asia (42.096N/ 73.540E) Depth: 24km. Magnitude: 6.8R. An estimated 74 people killed including 14 by landslides in Toluk. Several villages including Toluk destroyed in the Susmytra mountains and at least 8,200 dwellings destroyed. Impact felt over 300 miles across central Asia to China; tremor lasted 20 seconds in Tashkent.

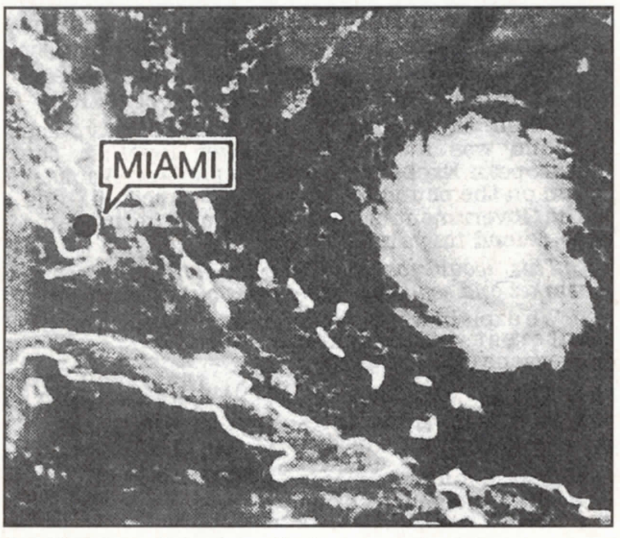
2 Sep – quake off coast of Nicaragua (11.715N/ 87.406W) Depth:33km. Magnitude: 5.2R. At least 105 killed, 63 missing and 16,000 homeless. At least 1,143 houses and 185 fishing boats were destroyed along the west coast of Nicaragua. Some damage also reported in Costa Rica. Most of the casualties and damage caused by a Tsunami in the Pacific.

11 Sep – quake in Zaire (6.096S/ 26.733E) Depth:10km. Magnitude:6.7R. Eight killed, 37 injured and several buildings destroyed at Kabalo. Largest earthquake ever recorded in central Africa.

AIR

Late July/Early Aug – Florida, USA: wet June followed by exceptionally hot and dry July – Daytona Beach: mean temp. 28.5° C (83.4° F), only 0.16in. rain – hottest and driest July on record; Kansas City, Missouri: 15.47 inches of rain, 50% up on previous record for month; northern USA: much cooler than normal, breaking 1915 record; Albany, New York: mean temp. 19.8° C (67.6° F) – broke record low for July of 20.2 °C (68.3° F) set in 1860.

23 Aug – Florida, USA: Caribbean: winds from Hurricane Andrew, predicted as most powerful storm to hit USA in decades, reach 150mph in the Bahamas; storm sea surges 13-18ft; four reported dead. State of emergency declared in Florida; National Guard on alert; millions ordered to evacuate.



Satellite view of Hurricane Andrew near the Bahamas

24 Aug – Dade County, Florida: Hurricane Andrew winds of 140 mph, gusts up to 165mph. Hundreds injured, 15 reported dead. Declared a disaster area. "Dade County as we know it is never going to be the same again", says local official. Many exotic animals escape (see report on page 13). Hurricane crosses southern Florida, enters Gulf of Mexico and heads for Louisiana. Evacuation ordered along Louisiana and Texas coastline.

25 Aug – Louisiana: Hurricane winds down to 125 mph. Flooding in low-lying coastal areas. Tornado 'spun off by the storm' – one of several spotted in the state – rips through LaPlace, a New Orleans suburb.

There were comparatively few dead from Hurricane Andrew, as it just missed the major population centres in the Bahamas, Miami and New Orleans. Many, however, were injured, over 50,000 made homeless and there was widespread diarrhoea and fear of other water-born ailments. Billions of dollars in property damage made it "easily the most costly natural disaster in US history".

Late August – Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada: after a week of near-record heat – 34° C (93° F) – the mercury plummeted to 0° C (32° F) with an inch and a half of snow.

25 Sept – Scientists announce further evidence that volcanic eruptions may seriously deplete the Earth's ozone layer, linking 10-15% reduction (up to 50% in lower and upper stratosphere) with Mount Hudson eruption in Aug 1991. The growth of the ozone 'hole' is said to increase ultra violet (particularly UV-B) radiation, which reduces crop yields, stunts growth and reduces fertility in many common plants and trees.

27 Sept – Ozone layer dropped to 40% of usual level; the hole opened much earlier than in previous years and the depletion rate is higher; it is said that Mount Pinatubo's 1991 eruption may be partly responsible for this year's record hole; although CFC output is still stressed as an important factor.

FIRE

6 Aug – Bielarus (former Soviet republic): forest fires sweep area worst polluted by Chernobyl disaster, raising background radiation – local officials say there is no

danger to inhabitants.

USA: forest fires destroyed at least seven houses and threatened more than 400 others in Oregon; forest, brush and grass fires burned more than 323,000 acres during previous week in California, Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Nevada.

15 Aug – Luzon Island, Philippines: small earthquakes. Mount Pinatubo's eruption on 9 June 1991 was one of the largest this century. It had been dormant for over 600 years. The shroud of gas and dust from this eruption made New York average July temperatures 2.5 F below average. Millions of tons of tiny rock fragments and sulphur dioxide, forming an aerosol of sulphuric acid in the stratosphere 14-16 miles up, blocked solar radiation and reduced it by 2%-4%. The temperature drop allegedly almost cancelled out the global warming of the last 100 years.

Another factor blamed for the cooling (or perhaps a result of the volcanic emissions?) is southern drift of the jet stream since last March, pulling cool weather systems down from Canada. Abnormal amount of ice in Hudson Bay in early August. Frost starting in Midwest already, possibly affecting harvests.

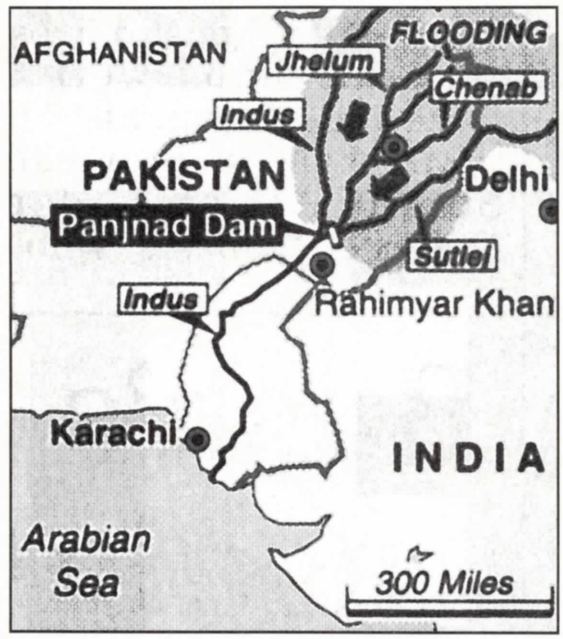
17-19 Aug – Mount Spurr, Alaska, erupts for second time this summer; ash ejected 11 miles into atmosphere.

26 & 27 Aug – Luzon Island, Philippines: hundreds of tremors as magma rises towards the surface of Pinatubo. "Quiet buildup or explosive eruption" predicted. 709 low-frequency and 45 high-frequency tremors recorded. (Low-frequency quakes indicate molten rock rising to the surface; high-frequency quakes show that rock underneath the volcano is fracturing under pressure.)

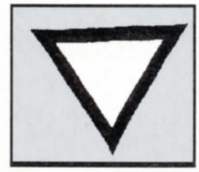
27 Aug – Katowice, Southern Poland: forest fire destroys 12,350 acres "spreading at 90 mph" .

6 Sept – North of Athens, Greece: uncontrollable forest fire started in rubbish dump; homes destroyed, main motorway closed. Meanwhile, 37,000 acres of wood and scrubland blaze for 36 hours in northern Corsica - arson suspected.

21 Sept – Philippines: international flights turned back due to heavy Pinatubo ash in atmosphere. Heavy tropical rains triggered explosions in superheated debris spewed out back in June 1991. Ash cloud rose 11 miles, blocking out sun and bringing darkness to the volcano's area at 11:00am.



Map showing flooding in the Punjab region of India



WATER

9 Aug – Bayonne area, France: egg-sized hailstones smashed through roofs and car windows.

21 Aug – Medicine Hat, Canada: golfball-sized hailstones.

30 Aug – South Island, New Zealand: worst snow storms in living memory; farmers begin burying 1.2 million sheep.

3 Sept – Northern Shandong province, east coast of China: Tropical Storm Polly (or Poly). Torrential rains, high winds, 17ft waves, 150 people dead, 3,490 domestic animals killed, 1,419 fishing boats destroyed and 10,894 houses flattened. **Afghanistan (Hindu Kush):** torrents of mud and boulders, 33ft thick poured down river valleys following torrential rains; 450 dead, 500 missing; death toll could reach 3,000; poor harvest and food shortage predicted since the fertile soil washed away.

5 Sept – Achill Island, Ireland: freak summer storm, washing away roads but exposing possible gold-, lead- and zinc-bearing rocks.

10 Sept – Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan: flash floods, following two days' incessant rain; burst banks of rivers Jhelum, Neelum, Chinab, Tawwi – 200 dead, 200 missing; landslides in Muzzaffarabad – 80 dead.

Canton, China: tail end of cyclone Omar gives over 9in. rain in one of wettest spells ever; 5.5in. in 24 hours, exceeding previous record of 3in.

12 Sept – Hawaii: Hurricane Iniki nudges Oahu and Niihau, hits Kauai: "worst storm to hit the island chain this century" – winds 130mph, gusts of 160mph; 20-30ft waves; 3 dead, 98 injured; 8,000 (or 7,000) homeless.

13-16 Sept – Pakistan/northern India: continued flooding now moving downstream to Punjab - 2,000 to 5,000 dead - one million homeless; 900,000 acres of cotton and 400,000 acres of rice destroyed. One possible reason for the excessive flooding was the opening of the Mangla Dam sluice-gates, which the engineers feared might collapse. The following week, vast areas are inundated, with huge losses to crops and tens of thousands of domestic animals drowned. Protests against government failures of flood relief: a crowd in Malakwal wave their shoes at a chief minister, a grave insult in Pakistan.

18 Sep – South-west England: fine red dust fell with early morning rain. The deposits – thought to be sand from the Sahara – were particularly noticeable on cars and greenhouses. "The dust was carried in warm, moist air which has come up from the south," said the Plymouth Weather Centre.

22-23 Sept – Vaucluse region, France: four-year drought with most rivers run dry was ended by violent rainstorms, likened to Asian monsoons, followed by severe floods: up to 80 dead. 30 houses destroyed by 'river of mud' in Vaison-la-Romaine, with a dozen toppled by violent winds gusting up to 100mph. Damage seen 50ft. above normal water-level. 'Roman bridge' submerged for first time since 1616.

Up to a half of the region's normal annual rainfall fell in a few hours. Floods blamed on deforestation, loss of agriculture in favour of camping sites and flimsy buildings.

The same storm system inundates England, causing swollen rivers in south and central regions. Tributaries of River Brent in north London overrun their banks, flooding streets in Edgware to 4ft; floods in Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Midlands, Bedfordshire, Yorkshire. Flash floods around Savona in Italy, two people missing; landslides, a highway viaduct, houses and buildings crumbling.

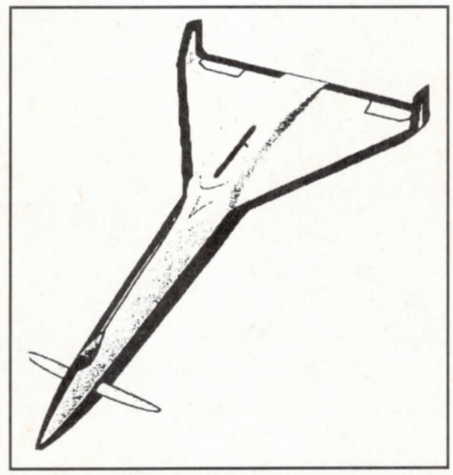
Special thanks to the Global Seismology Group of the British Geological Survey for the earthquake data.

SPY PLANES AND SONIC BOOMS

STRANGE BANGS AND TREMORS, not caused by earthquakes, have been felt recently in the USA, Britain and Holland. PAUL SIEVEKING investigates.

A mysterious rumble and tremor occurred in the San Gabriel Valley near Los Angeles in June, October and November 1991 and in January and April 1992, always about 7:00am on Thursdays. "It's something that's travelling through the atmosphere at several times the speed of sound in a generally northeasterly direction", according to Jim Mori, a seismologist with the US Geological Survey at Caltech.

Jane's Defence Weekly in London said the Thursday booms could be caused by the spy plane codenamed *Aurora*, capable of flying at six times the speed of sound, or about 4,000mph. Built at the Lockheed Corporation's 'Skunk Works' in Burbank, California, it can circumnavigate the globe in eight hours. The turbulence has a signature, or wave pattern, on a seismograph unlike that of any known aircraft.



Artist's impression of the secret American spy plane, code-named Aurora.

While the Air Force denies the existence of Aurora, *Jane's* editor Bill Sweetman says that it is probably one of the Defence Department's so-called 'black' programmes, a top secret project whose funding is disguised in the defence procurement budget as one of a number of 'selected activities'. Eight billion dollars have already gone into the aircraft's development.

Knowledge of Aurora first came from a 1986 Defence Department budget report, in which it was listed – apparently by mistake – next to the SR-71 Blackbird and the U-2, two Air Force spy planes. Analysts believe the new plane, with a distinctive 66ft bat-wing design, is being prepared as a replacement for Blackbird, retired from service in 1989.

In March 1992, *Aviation Week and Space Technology* reported nightime sightings of an unknown aircraft with a diamond-shaped lighting pattern near Beale Air Force Base in Yube County, California. It had a distinctive noise, "like air rushing through a big tube". Sweetman speculated that it had been on a test run from Groom Lake, a research and development base near Las Vegas. *San Jose (CA) Mercury News, 20 April 1992.*

DOUGHNUTS ON A ROPE

Defence expert Nick Cook at *Jane's* also blamed Aurora for a mystery 'boom' that rocked a 10-mile area around Ilminster in Somerset on 29 July 1992, which he matched up with similar reports from Herefordshire and Scotland. "Witnesses in all three places reported a howling sound accompanied by a 'doughnuts on a rope' smoke trail in the sky. George Luck, who works near Martock in Somerset, said: "It was like a big wallop, not the crack sound we used to get when Concorde flew overhead, and it shook the whole building." *Western Gazette, 30 July 1992.*

Reports of an extremely fast-moving radar blip leaving the area around the joint NATO-RAF base at Machrihanish on the Kintyre peninsula in Argyll in November 1991 were tentatively put down to Aurora, according to a report in *The Scotsman* last February. *Flight International* last July claimed that Aurora had visited Machrihanish. The Scottish airfield is the longest in Europe. It has played host to US F117A Stealth aircraft on nighttime proving flights from Nevada and to the SR-71 Blackbirds.

The 'doughnuts on a rope' vapour trails have been seen frequently across America this year, according to the US *Aviation Week and Space Technology*. Pictures of such a trail were taken from Amarillo, Texas, in May. The trails are thought to arise from a new propulsion system, such as a pulse detonation wave engine, developed from the pulse jet used on German V-1 flying bombs in the 1940s. *Scotsman, 27 July 1992.*

On 16 March 1989, Mrs Patricia Anderson photographed a strange aircraft over Heathall wartime airfield northeast of Dumfries. "It was oval-shaped and grey-coloured, and much bigger than an RAF Tornado, with what I presume were engine intakes looking like a pair of giant eyes as it approached. It was also very, very quiet." She reported the sighting to the Civil Aviation Authority. Shortly afterwards, the police came round and interrogated her. The local print shop told her that her film had come out blank. Later, she was informed by phone that she had seen a top secret aircraft and should forget all about it. *Glasgow Herald, 8 Sept 1992.*

DUTCH "METEORITE"

On 19 August 1992, people in the Dutch province of Friesland heard a loud bang and felt tremors, which rocked houses and sent crockery tumbling from shelves. With the recent earthquake in the southern part of the Netherlands fresh in their minds, more than 100 people called the police. Hein Haak, spokesman for the Royal Dutch Meteorological Institute, said that seismic stations near the town of Assen, to the east of Friesland, registered the passing of an acoustic shock wave, which ruled out an earthquake. There were no jets flying at the time of the explosion.

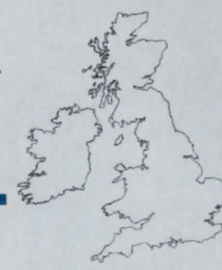
Although the sky was almost entirely obscured by cloud, the wire services reported that at least 10 people reported seeing a red, yellow and orange ball of flame at around 10:30pm, hurtling in over the North Sea. Niek de Kort of the Dutch Meteorite Documentation centre suggested that there had been an explosion of a large, rather porous stony meteorite, measuring about a metre across, at a height of about 10 kilometres, less than a second before it would have hit the ground near the town of Joure.

However, the meteor theory was soon discarded. "No space debris has been found", said Hein Haak, "and despite our appeals, not many people reported actually seeing anything bright or burning falling from the sky." He thought the most likely explanation was our old pal Aurora. The flight was provisionally located 30 miles west of Texel island at an altitude of at least six miles, because it was not picked up on radar, according to *New Scientist*, although the *Glasgow Herald* said that a fleeting radar blip had been picked up by Oceanic air traffic control in Prestwick.

Professor Rob Schuiling of the University of Utrecht said Haak's theory was 'comical and most unlikely'. He said that the tremors were most likely due to earth movements after natural gas escaped from large underground chambers. The Netherlands' huge Slochteren gasfield extends far under the northern provinces of Groningen and Friesland. *Int. Herald Tribune, 21 Aug; New Scientist, 29 Aug + 12 Sept; [AP] Wellington (NZ) Evening Post, 2 Sept; Glasgow Herald, 3 Sept 1992.*

SECRET COUNTRY

Mysterious places to visit in Great Britain compiled by Janet & Colin Bord



6: Bungay & Blythburgh, Suffolk

The phantom black dogs that lope menacingly through British folklore and ghostlore represent a puzzling phenomenon which features in the real experiences of living people as well as in traditional tales. Black Dogs cannot be wholly consigned to the realm of fiction, because people still see them today. Their appearances are always enigmatic; to see one is an unforgettable event, and usually has some special significance for the witness.

In the usual form of the story, the Black Dog is a large, yet friendly, animal, appearing from nowhere to escort a woman travelling alone along a dark rural road. It is convincingly substantial until she puts out a hand to pat her welcome companion... and feels nothing at all! There have been reports of such guardians protecting women from lurking vagabonds who have been deterred by the sight of such seemingly real animals. Yet, sometimes, the animals appear to be omens of death and disaster, and as such not at all welcome to those who see them unexpectedly.

Over the centuries, Black Dogs have been seen in all parts of the British Isles (though they are sometimes white, or occasionally grey, brown or yellow), and are usually distinguishable from living dogs by their large size, shaggy coat, huge fiery eyes, and their behaviour. A book could be written detailing their activities, but we'll concentrate, here, on probably the most famous Black Shuck of East Anglia, a county particularly rich in Black Dog lore.

At the height of a terrible storm on the morning of Sunday, 4 August 1577, a Black Dog suddenly appeared in the churches at Bungay and Blythburgh. His presence was fatal, for he passed between two members of the congregation as they knelt in prayer, and "as it seemed, wrung the necks of them bothe at one instant clene backward, insomuch that even at a moment where they kneeled, they strangely dyed." Another man was injured when the Black Dog "gave him such a gripe on the back, that therewith all he was presently drawn togither and shrunk up, as it were a piece of lether scorched in a hot fire; or as the mouth of a purse or bag drawen togither with a string."

Abraham Fleming, who reported this event in his pamphlet *A Straunge and Terrible Wunder ...*, published soon after the event, also told what happened at Blythburgh: "On that self-same day, in like manner, into the parish church of another towne called Blibery, not above seven miles distant from Bongay [..] the like thing Entred, in the same shape and similitude, where placing himself uppon a maine balke or beam, whereon some ye Rood did stand, sodainely he gave a swinge downe through ye church, and there also, as before, slew two men and a lad, and burned the hand of another person that was among the rest of the company, of whom divers were blasted. This mischief thus wrought, he flew with wonderful force to no little feare of the assembly, out of the church in a hideous and hellish likeness."

This devilish dog left his calling card at Blythburgh, where burnt claw-like marks can still be seen on the church door. At Bungay, the event is commemorated in the design of a weather vane in the town centre, which features a black dog. Both churches are well worth visiting, but especially the fine 15th-century building at Blythburgh, with its curious pew ends and wonderful roof, bearing angels.

Janet and Colin Bord are authors of *Mysterious Britain, The Secret Country, Alien Animals, The Atlas of Magical Britain,* and *Modern Mysteries of Britain* among many other books.

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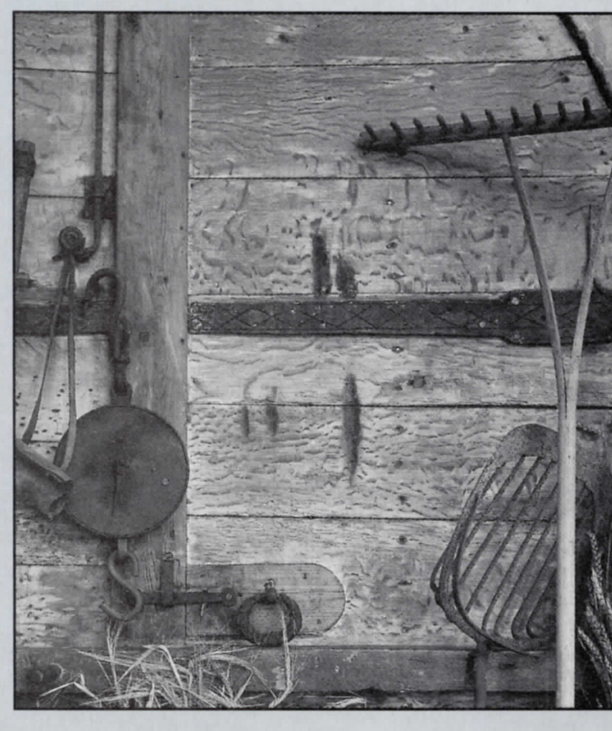

TOP: Blythburgh church. RIGHT: The Black Dog on Bungay's weathervane. ABOVE: Marks on the door of Blythburgh church, allegedly made by the Black Dog.

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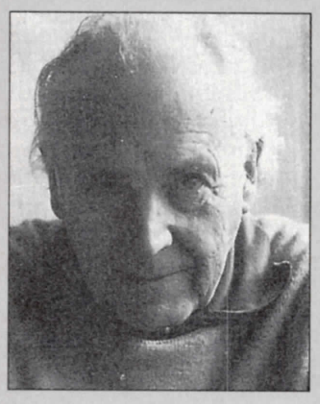
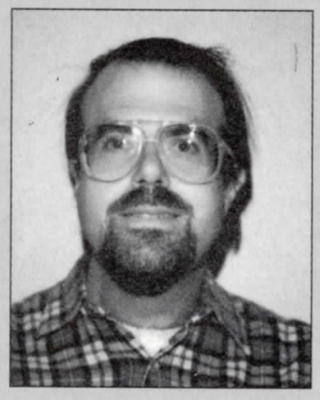
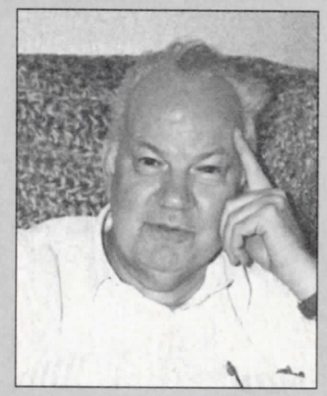


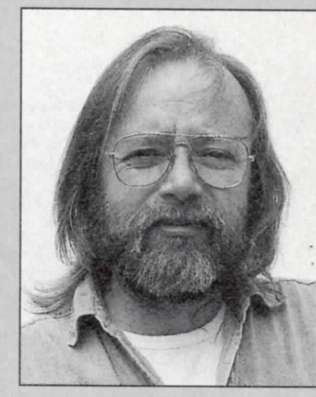
PSYCHICAL RESEARCH:
Brian Inglis is a past editor of *The Spectator* and veteran of over 20 books on parapsychology and fringe medicine, including the monumental *Natural and Supernatural*



FOLKLORE:
Bill Ellis, Ph.D. (Ohio State) lectures on folklore and edits *FOAFtale News*, the newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research



UFOLOGY:
John Keel is a New York journalist and author of seminal works on ufology such as *Operation Trojan Horse* (1970) and *The Mothman Prophecies* (1975)



EARTH MYSTERIES:
Paul Devereux is a prolific writer, researcher and lecturer on earth mysteries. He edits *The Ley Hunter* and is the founder/director of the *Dragon Project Trust.*

Psychical Research

Mind and Grey Matter

Brian Inglis looks at attempts to deny the existence of mind as distinct from brain

Reviewing *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* when it was published five years ago, I was not surprised to find that the entries on the history of psychical research and on ESP had been entrusted to the leading sceptic of the time, Christopher Evans; or to read, in the editor's commentary on psychical phenomena, "We may seriously doubt whether there are any". But how to account for the fact that in a work which devoted over 50 columns to nerve connections, the nervous system and neuroanatomical techniques, intuition was allotted three paragraphs, and inspiration, only one. As for imagination, it did not even have an entry.

This set me off on an agreeable train of fantasy. If I had the money and the time, what fun it would be to prosecute the Oxford University Press for an offence under the Trades Descriptions Act! 'Mind' hardly featured. The late B.F. Skinner was allowed to preach his behaviourist gospel "dismissing mental states and processes as metaphors and fictions"; for the most part, however, the entries revealed the powerful influence of behaviourism's successor, cognitive psychology, less crazy but still fundamentally materialist, hostile even to considering the evidence that mind exists in its own right, independently of brain.

The evidence that it does appears to me to be incontrovertible. How else can the organisation of a termitary be accounted for? I was delighted to come across a copy of Eugene Marais' *The Soul of the White Ant* the other day - better still, in the single volume with *The Soul of the Ape:* I had missed it when Penguin brought it out in 1989 – and to read again his carefully accumulated evidence of a soul, regulating a termitary's life.

> "If I had the money and the time, what fun it would be to prosecute the Oxford University Press ... under the Trades Descriptions Act!"

Marais, a follower of Darwin, did not care for the term soul, but he could not think of a better alternative. Lewis Thomas in his essays has more than once drawn attention to the failure of biologists to account for the evidence of a single intelligence at work running an anthill; an ant, after all, is "only a few neurons strung together by fibres", and "cannot be imagined to have a mind at all". Yet 'mind' is scarcely an adequate term to account for the long-term planning, design and performance Marais observed and reported.

E.O. Wilson, the protagonist of sociobiology – that last ditch attempt to fit biology into the mechanistic sciences - has recently been claiming that he and his disciples are in the process of explaining ant organisation and behaviour in terms which will make it unnecessary to think in terms of a group mind – let alone a group soul. But the evidence they have provided so far suggests that they are indulging in what Popper has derided as promissory materialism – hopeful thinking.

If a group mind, or soul, is in existence at so early an evolutionary stage, there is surely little difficulty in accounting for the existence of our occasional experiences of extra-sensory perception? Or should we classify them as psychokinetic, as some parapsychologists have suggested?

"A few neurons strung together by fibres", after all, can hardly be claimed to have the ability to perceive. Perhaps the group mind – perhaps our own minds – work directly on and through our grey matter?

Space Conspiracies

Bill Ellis examines the popularity of the 'slave labour in space' conspiracy

Fortean Times' recent piece on *Alternative 3 [FT64:47]* is a welcome addition to the slim amount of good information on the original TV show. I think, however, you underestimate two important angles of the controversy it has caused.

Firstly, A3 seems to have become and remained far more popular in the United States than in Great Britain. Part of the reason is the 'mystery' behind American TV networks' failure to air the original show and the genuine difficulty people have in obtaining copies of Leslie Watkins's book. It was fleetingly available here from the US paperback firm Avon (later publishers of *Communion, Transformation,* et al.), but after one printing it was withdrawn (I'm told) because of copyright difficulties.

The library at the college campus where I work obtained a copy in a mass of paperbacks donated to their 'Browsing Room', and when the librarian accessioned it in his computer card catalogue, he received a flood of inter-library loan requests, mostly from the US West. (That's how I found out about it.) The Sphere paperback is fitfully available from import houses like Arcturus, but illegal photocopies of borrowed copies are also sold under the counter at alternative book stores.

Jerome Clark tells me that at least one group of UFO enthusiasts has taken a bootleg video of the original show on tour, charging money for a screening plus a lecture on how A3 fits into other conspiracy theories active in the US. I haven't seen videos for sale, but for a time you could buy an audiotape of the A3 soundtrack from a mail order firm.

Among those who have cheerfully adopted the A3 scenario are Milton William Cooper, who was for a time one of the superstars of the American 'whistle-blowers', or former military types who claimed to have seen secret documents proving US/USSR collaboration, usually with the help of sinister aliens from Zeta Reticuli. Interestingly, where the original A3 plot had citizens abducted, 'desexed' and taken to slavery on Mars, Cooper omits the desexing and adds 'gun control' at the appropriate moment, legal possession of firearms being essentially equal to sexual potency in the eyes of most American conspiracy-experts. The stress A3 put on the Dartmoor horse mutilation case [*FT22:30, FT23:3, FT27:49*] likewise helped integrate its plot into the equally Byzantine scenarios that circulated about who was slicing up livestock and why. (*Endangered Species* (1982) is another conspiracy movie that ought to be mentioned as an *A3* analogue.)

Secondly, you might have stressed more the creative role that Leslie Watkins took in expanding the original screenplay into a full-length book. Watkins was an impressive British Fortean in his own right, and his books of legitimate scholarship include *The Sleepwalk Killers* (Everest, London 1976), a summary of murder cases involving automatism [cf *FT64:20*]. His *The Real Exorcists* (Methuen, London 1983) is an extremely valuable survey of the Deliverance Ministry, the fundamentalist faction who believed that dabbling in the occult invited demons into your children's heads and had an unfortunate habit of killing kids in the process of getting them out (the same group gave us satanic ritual abuse, not coincidentally).

> "For some time after *Alternative 3* was published," admitted Watkins, "I have reason to suppose that my home telephone was being tapped."

The US/USSR conspirators (who speak via transcripts in that fey slang lingo that Britons seem to believe is native to Chicago gangsters) use automatism to induce would-be defectors to commit suicide in their sleep. They also employ 'hot jobs', or spontaneous human combustion, to terminate especially difficult cases. And part of the local colour of the 'Astronaut Grodin' material derives from Fortean reports of alien vehicle tracks on the moon.

As for Watkins, he was at last notice Director of Studies at the New Zealand School of Journalism, Auckland. He was briefly scheduled in 1990 for an interview on American radio concerning the latest A3 controversy, but had to cancel due to illness. Shortly before, he wrote to an American book firm that was trying to import copies of A3, confirming that he had originally aimed to present the book's premise as so far out that readers would immediately see it as fiction.

"Immediately after publication", Watkins continued, "I realised I was totally wrong. In fact the amazing mountains of letters from virtually all parts of the world - including vast numbers from highly intelligent people in positions of responsibility - convinced me that I had *accidentally* trespassed into a range of top-secret truths. Documentary evidence provided by many of these correspondents decided me to write a serious and *completely non-fiction* sequel.

"Unfortunately, a chest containing the bulk of the letters was among the items which were mysteriously *lost in transit* some four years ago when I moved from London, England, to Sydney, Australia, before I moved on to settle in New Zealand. For some time after *Alternative 3* was originally published, I have reason to suppose that my home telephone was being tapped and my contacts who were experienced in such matters were convinced that certain intelligence agencies considered that I probably knew too much." (This letter, to a Ms Dittrich, was circulated on American computer networks on 28 October 1989.)

In a later letter, Watkins was coy about the exact nature of the truths onto which he had stumbled, except to say that he felt that the book was "probably 65% truth, 35% fiction". (Faxed letter, 26 Aug 1990, reprinted in *Nevada Aerial Research Group Newsletter* #20, p2-3, Feb 1991.)

It is, of course, hard to say whether this coyness is based on Watkins's actual beliefs or his desire to sell more copies of his book among conspiracy buffs. The book, in fact, takes a similar "they said it was a hoax but it's really fact" approach to the press flap over the original video broadcast. Whatever the case, *Alternative 3* (the book) is in fact one of the best-crafted and most comprehensive novelisations of Forteana, and it surely deserves to have a cult devoted to it.

FORUM is a column in which anyone with something to say about a particular field, theory or incident can share their thoughts with our readership. If you'd like to join in with an opinion on any area of Forteana, send it in to the editorial address. Ideal length: 500-1000 words. Please enclose a head and shoulders photo of yourself with all Forum submissions.

A Day of Reckoning

John Keel looks at the professionals who have become involved with UFOs

When the famous American comedian Jackie Gleason succumbed to cancer on June 24, 1987, a handful of informed UFO-philes nearly had heart attacks themselves. Although the general public was not aware of it, Gleason was a dedicated hardcore UFO buff and June 24th is one of the most significant dates in flying saucer history. Not only did Kenneth Arnold have his historic sighting of nine luminous blobs at a distance of 50 miles on June 24, 1947, but many other important events have occurred on that date, particularly in religion and occultism.

An outstanding star on American television in the 1950s and 60s, Gleason also appeared in many major motion pictures. His talents were so varied and unique that he was nicknamed 'the Great One' by his peers. Once a devout Catholic, the rotund comedian's 1950's series *The Honeymooners* still airs on TV stations throughout the USA and has a large cult following.

In the course of his highly productive life he earned millions of dollars. He spent some of it on the design and construction of an unusual home in a secluded part of the Catskill mountains near Peekskill, New York. It was a circular mansion which appeared to be a grounded flying saucer. Gleason's huge library of books on UFOs and psychic phenomena was housed there. In his rare appearances on all–night radio shows, such as the famed Long John Nebel talk show in New York City, he talked at length about his library and his lifelong interest in Forteana. He seemed convinced that UFOs were a melding of occult manifestations and the human psyche.

However, he was not above exploiting his interests in the paranormal when, like various contactees, he explained prolonged absences from his home by telling his wife that he had been visiting secret bases to look at the bodies of little men pickled in bottles. Actually, he was a heavy drinker and a ladies' man, using UFOs to cover his extramarital activities. [See *The Great One: The Life and Legend of Jackie Gleason* by William A. Henry, Doubleday, 1992.]

The notion that the US Air Force had bottled some Martians was planted in the public consciousness in the late 1940s by a humorist and columnist for the show business newspaper *Variety* named Frank Scully. He was the first professional to take a real interest in the UFO mystery. One of his informants, an oil prospector named Silas Newton, passed along some hearsay about a saucer crashing near Aztec, New Mexico and Scully used it as "the hook" for a book of his columns published in the spring of 1950, following the release of the USAF's anti-UFO *Project Grudge Report*. Scully's *Behind the Flying Saucers* sold in such large numbers that it is still easily available in secondhand bookstores today.

American UFO buffs later vilified Scully, unfairly attacking him because he had devoted a couple of his columns to Newton's claims. Scully had included a tongue-in-cheek criticism of an article by Donald Keyhoe that had appeared in *True*, which was then a new magazine for men. Its editors were looking for a circulation builder. Keyhoe's wild-eyed, biased, poorly–written declaration that "flying saucers are real" seemed perfect. Scully pointed out in his book that Keyhoe's article was just a clumsy rehash of data culled from the books of Charles Fort.

> "In an area filled with pretenders and quasi-famous 'ufologists' there are few stars."

The *True* editors, and Keyhoe himself, decided to "get" Scully. They hired an unemployed newspaperman to investigate Newton who – big surprise – turned out to be a known swindler and confidence man. Since the American UFO buffs of those days tended to have "criminal" minds, unable to distinguish right from wrong (traits which still dominate some tiny US UFO cults), they began a campaign of slander and nonsense against Scully that persists to this day. Scully, a one-legged Catholic who was once offered the nomination for Lieutenant Governor of California, later wrote in personal letters to publications such as *Saucer News* that he was sorry he had ever bothered with the flying saucer scene and the psychotic people attracted to it.

Frank Scully died on June 24, 1964.

Very few professionals have ever tangled with the UFO field. They can almost be counted on the fingers of one hand. There was Ralph Blum, a winner of the National Book Award in the 1970s, and famed aviation writer Martin Caidin in the 1980s. Perhaps the best–known pro of the 1950s and 60s was radio news commentator Frank Edwards. In 1966, at the peak of the biggest flying saucer wave in US history, Edwards hastily assembled his *Flying Saucers: Serious Business* in six weeks. The book had phenomenal success, selling 100,000 copies in hard cover and millions in paperback. Unfortunately, Edwards did not have a chance to enjoy his fame or newfound fortune. He died suddenly on June 23, 1967, missing the 24th by only a few hours.

In an arena filled with pretenders and quasi-famous "ufologists" there are few stars. That is, advocates that can attract audiences or sell books to the non-cultist population. A charming old occultist named George Adamski was one of those rare birds. He broke the pattern, though, when he died with a minimum of fuss in Washington, DC., on April 23, 1965. A few hours later, on April 24th, a British gardener in Devon named Arthur Bryant reportedly had an encounter with two ufonauts, one of whom identified himself as "Yamski". (News of Adamski's death would not reach England for many days.)

Mr. Bryant became the center of an involved series of events that became known as "the Scoriton mystery". He died two years later on June 24, 1967; the same day as Richard Church, another well-known British contactee.

Willy Ley, the great authority on rockets and space travel who was obliquely responsible for getting the U.S. space program started, checked out on June 24, 1969.

On the religious front, scores of apparitions and events have taken place around the summer and winter solstices – June 21-24 and December 21-24 – inspiring an endless fountain of lore. On June 24, 1981, six youngsters in Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, had the first of a series of visions of the Virgin which gained worldwide attention. The apparition promised impending doom and now that area is involved in a disastrous civil war.

Spirit Lines

Paul Devereux theorises that landscape lines relate to the 'spirit lines' of shamanism

The obvious fact that very similar motifs associated with spirits and lines occurred in different cultures and times convinced me that the meaning of landscape lines had to lie with the universality of human consciousness, and the obvious place to look for it was in shamanism, itself a universal expression of the human mind.

The shaman was, of course, the intermediary between the tribe and the spirit worlds. While in the spirit realms, the shaman's soul shared the same nature as the souls of the ancestors, the dead. The shaman entered the spirit worlds by means of an out-of-body, ecstatic 'journey' during trance. This was induced by a variety of techniques, such as drumming and hallucinogens. Alkaloids in traditional native hallucinogenic preparations specifically promote the sensation of spirit flight.

This shamanic 'flight of the soul' seems to have been translated onto ancient sacred landscapes as straight lines. Some of these were physical, and later became variously acculturated as spirit ways, roads of the dead and eventually even sacred ways, triumphal routes or royal roads. Other lines were conceptual, as in Celtic fairy lore.

The Kogi Indians of northern Columbia are the best preserved Native American society, with an extant shamanic theocracy and paved tracks. It has recently been discovered that some (at least) of these paths are seen by the Kogi as traces of the shamans' out-of-body journeys in *aluna*, a spirit version of the physical Earth. There are also rituals involving the symbolic sweeping and cleaning of the physical paths.

The *straightness* comes, conceptually, from the fact that flight is the straight way over the land. We have the phrase "as the crow flies" which expresses this precisely. "As straight as an arrow is a similar-meaning phrase, and the arrow was used widely as shamanic symbolism for spirit flight. The Koryak shaman, for instance, was said to leave his body along the path traced by an arrow released from his bow.

Neurologically, the straightness derives from the entoptic ('within vision') nature of the out-of-body experience. Certain neurological 'form constants' come into play during trance conditions. They are marked in cave art, and the Tukano of South America, who see them in their hallucinogenic trances, use them as the basis for their decorative art. One key entoptic form is the spiral or tunnel; the 'straight way' is expressed in Near Death Experiences as a tunnel, and as a UFO's 'traction beam' in those spontaneous out-of-body cases that are interpreted as UFO abductions in our crude society, which is so alarmingly ignorant of the realms of consciousness.

> "Acculturated versions of spirit flight are found in the mid-winter flight of Santa Claus in his sleigh pulled by reindeer."

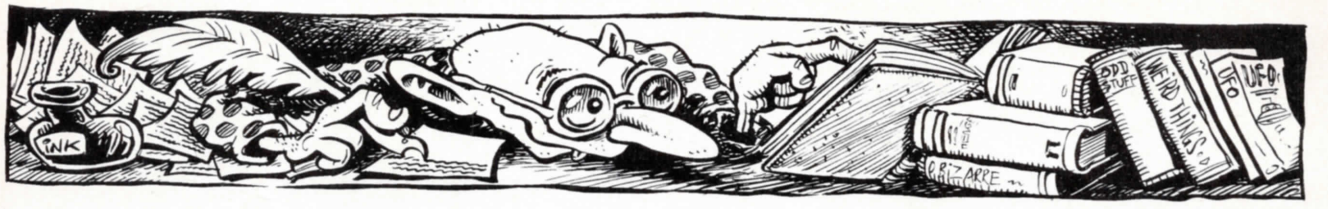
Symbolism of the shaman's out-of-body journey is deeply inscribed in shamanic tradition and artifacts worldwide as bird forms and associations. The Mississippian Indians (c 900-1500 AD) even had a recurring depiction on pottery and shells that archæologists refer to as 'the flying shaman motif'. Bird costumes, masks, sticks, feathers and so on recur constantly in connection with magical spirit flight in all ages and countries. The Taoist priest was known as a 'feather scholar' because of his links with shamanism, and it is probably though Taoism that the idea of spirit lines became embedded in *Feng shui*.

Modern acculturated versions of spirit flight are to be found in the midwinter night flight of Santa Claus in his sleigh pulled by reindeer. This is thought to originate from arctic and Siberian shamanism, where the tribes were reindeer herders. The hallucinogenic fly agaric mushroom was used by these people, and its cap is red and white like Santa's robes. The other popular image is of the witch flying on her broomstick. This derives from the habit of 'wise women' using hallucinogenic flying ointments to go 'Night Travelling'. The alkaloids in these could penetrate intact skin, and the broom handle was used to apply the salves to the sensitive vaginal tissues. It was the mediæval church which satanised these folk relics of indigenous European shamanism.

Shamanic traditions, and the newly-perceived shamanic landscapes revealed by their lines and effigy mounds, survived better in the Americas than in Eurasia, where greater cultural flux occurred. Great religions arose in Eurasia, absorbing or marginalising shamanism. As tribes evolved into more complex societies, so the shaman became priest, and the priesthood developed into theocracy or divine kingship monarchy, contains shamanic vestiges. As Mircea Eliade, the great religious historian, observed, the myth of magical flight was associated with kings and sovereigns from one end of Eurasia to the other. Chinese emperors and pagan Celtic kings all had the power of magical flight, as did mythic figures such as Odin. A proto-Indo-European word, **reg*, meant 'movement in a straight line', and was integrated into later words denoting aspects of kingship and governmental, spatial and moral order. Our English word 'ruler' thus derives, and means both leader and straight edge.

The unravelling of the mystery of the lines has only just begun, and is clearly a complex affair with many levels.

GURU
WHOA THERE, MAN... WHY THE BLINDFOLD?
SORRY GURU, BUT SHUTTING OUT THE MATERIAL WORLD HELPS ME TO CONQUER THE TEMPTATIONS OF LUST AND GREED.
NICE ONE BRO— BUT REMEMBER, ALWAYS SPARE A THOUGHT FOR THE TEMPTATION OF STUPIDITY.
© D.MOLLINS '91



REVIEWS

SPONTANEOUS HUMAN COMBUSTION

by Jenny Randles and Peter Hough.

Robert Hale, London. 1992, hb £14.95, pp224, plates, bib, refs, index.

When fireman Tony McMunn was called to a blaze in Chorley, in March 1980, nothing in his training or 23 years of experience prepared him for the sight in a pensioner's bedroom. All that remained of its occupant were her relatively unscathed legs from the knees down; the rest was calcined ash. There was no fire damage to the surrounding area; only smoke damage to the upper walls and ceiling. McMunn recalls: "I was taken aback. I had never seen anything like it before; neither had the ambulance men nor the police."

This reaction of shock and disbelief is echoed in the first-hand accounts from other members of the emergency professions, given in this important new study of what, for want of a better term, has been called 'spontaneous human combustion'(SHC). As soon as they take in the fatal scene, these professionals *know*, through reason and instinct, that this is not a normal death by fire. The more glaring paradox – typical of so many SHC cases – is the discrepancy between the intense and sustained heat needed to consume completely all or most of a body and the relatively minor damage to combustible and meltable materials close enough to be destroyed by a normal fire. As McMunn notes of the same case: "Even the bones were gone, yet [..] nearby objects, such as a brushed nylon footstool and clothes [..] were just stained." (p85)

Documented cases of SHC, of varying quality, go back to the 17th century, and in each period some of its brightest minds have ventured theories and experiments, and even incorporated the phenomenon into literary works. The number of books discussing SHC seriously can be counted on one hand, and I am on record as saying the definitive study has yet to be written. After some anticipation of this book, I have to say that this is not it; but to give credit where it is due, Randles and Hough have come up with something quite different and probably, in the long run, just as valuable. *Spontaneous Human Combustion* deals less with the canon of historical cases and theoretical groundwork, and concentrates on more modern material. Here, the Randles-Hough team come into their own with new case material, interviews with witnesses, discussions with a wide variety of 'experts', analysis of media reportage, and personal experience of the help or hindrance of coroners.

"All that remained were her legs ... the rest was ash. I was taken aback ... even the bones were gone."

The authors' narrative method often requires great endurance, for the reader has to slog through wearying blow by blow accounts of debates, claims and counter-claims, and details of every step of their inquiries; even when the insight is worth the plod, this reader wishes they had got to their point sooner.

A prime example of the book's value is the whole chapter devoted to the case of Mrs Reeser, who departed this life in a ball of fire in 1951, in St Petersburg, Florida. As in the chapter on Jack Angel and other survivors, the authors have met the objections of the sceptics head on with important new data from police, FBI and other investigative reports, which often reinforces the central mystery of an inexplicable blaze, and goes some way to answering the critics who have explained SHC away as poor investigation or misinterpretation of inadequate evidence. The personal experiences of Tony McMunn, another but anonymous fireman, and John Heymer, a scene-of-crime officer in the Gwent police, are given a full chapter each. Another chapter is devoted to a critique of the 1989 BBC1 documentary *QED*; by re-examining their witnesses and experts, our authors show that its sceptical conclusion was achieved by clever and biased editing and not, as was claimed, by impartial analysis.

The second half of the book is a broad discussion of the topic, illuminated by the light of apparently similar phenomena in vaguely related areas: such as poltergeists, crop circles, UFOs, Kundalini (psychic energy released by meditation), and electric people. Randles and Hough are sensible enough not to seek out a single solution for SHC, and thus avoid the folly shared by many UFO theories; on the other hand they adopt a scattergun approach which leaves one none the wiser about the relative merits of the various fields of speculation. For example, SHC researcher Larry Arnold's hypothetical 'pyrotron' particle; the cancer-like proliferation of heat-generating PEP molecules in tissue cells; the biophysical effects of seismically generated radiation from geological fault lines; and the ionising fields of ball lightning, were fascinating ideas and I would have liked to hear more about them. Perhaps it is enough that the authors have included such pointers; they certainly cannot be blamed for the deplorable lack of serious research, funded or otherwise, by scientific institutions.

As the topic is a particular interest of mine, I must say I really appreciate the hard work I know has gone into this study of a difficult subject. It saddens me, therefore, to see the same enthusiasm leading the authors into sloppiness which diminishes their achievement. Too many cases, in my opinion, have been credited to the late Michael Harrison; of these, most of the 1938-39 cases were taken by Harrison from the research of the Fortean SF writer Eric Frank Russell. Many others, including Case 49 (Lily White, the Antiguan girl whose clothes burned off her in 1928), and the famous cases of Butlock Heath (Case 43), and the Dewar sisters of Whitley Bay in 1908 (Case 46), among others, were lifted by Harrison from the works of Charles Fort. These kinds of errors arise from the laziness (from which even I suffer) of not tracing cases back to their earliest sources.

It is also wrong of the authors to claim

that their listing of 111 abstracted cases from between 1613 and 1990 is "the first ever catalogue" (p183). Apart from Fort's pioneering body of case material, and the selection made by Persinger and Lafrenière (whose work they cite), a referenced list of SHC cases appears in Ivan Sanderson's *Investigating the Unexplained* (1972), and another in an early issue of *INFO Journal*. And who could agree with such a naive and sweeping statement as "children do not become drunkards or smoke"? (p182) Today, there are many children who drink and smoke and worse, inhale many kinds of inflammable substances, yet I know of no SHC of a solvent-abuser. Do not let these cavils deter you from buying this work; they affect only a small part of what should become required reading for any student of the subject.

Throughout their inquiries, Randles and Hough came into contact with coroners or their officers; some were helpful enough, but others revealed a level of reluctance to help which bordered on active hindrance. The authors voice an opinion shared by other researchers into SHC that these public servants feel no obligation to the advancement of knowledge and have been known to refuse to hear any evidence that will lead to anything other than a quick, clean verdict. For this kind of coroner, researchers – who are bound to ask awkward questions – are a kind of ghoulish pest who will upset the status quo of a comfy job.

As Forteans we have no objection to "rational solutions" where these are truly rational; our darkest suspicions are aroused, however, when we observe intellectual and procedural gymnastics performed to accommodate mock rationalism. I cannot endorse the idea that there is an official conspiracy to suppress research into SHC, but it is a fact that officers and authorities effectively suppress the subject in a myriad of individual instances of ridicule, ignorance, and mental laziness for which there can be no excuse. Either there is a real phenomenon here or there is not. The public have a right to expect their medical scientists to determine this once and for all, and if the answer is positive, to research it.

Bob Rickard

WITCHCRAFT: A STRANGE CONFLICT

by Peter Hough.

Lutterworth Press, Cambridge. 1991, pb £7.95, pp199, sources, index.

Here is an account of Hough's personal investigation into the status of witchcraft and Satanism in modern Britain, seeking to find out whether their adherents are behind the wave of ritualistic child abuse cases as Christian fundamentalists allege. Although it has the advantage of an independent viewpoint unlike the recent Fundamentalist scaremongering books by Tim Tate and Andrew Boyd (reviewed last issue) – the narrative wanders, sometimes clear and convincing and other times leaving one more confused than ever on the very issues he tries to clarify.

To set the scene for his travels, Hough gives us a potted history of witchcraft. There is no doubt Hough put in a lot of reading time, but here and elsewhere in the book, a greater depth, perhaps even different analysis, could have been provided by a better understanding of the theological, historical and anthropological roots of the issues, and by less of a reliance upon contemporary newsclippings. For example, the transitions from an inferred proto-witchcraft in the Iron Age to the familiar witch persecutions of the Middle Ages to the modern post-Gardner-Murray revivals

TWELVE-TRIBE NATIONS

THE SCIENCE OF ENCHANTING THE LANDSCAPE

by John Michell and Christine Rhone.

Thames & Hudson, London. 1991, hb £18, pp192, bib, index, illus.

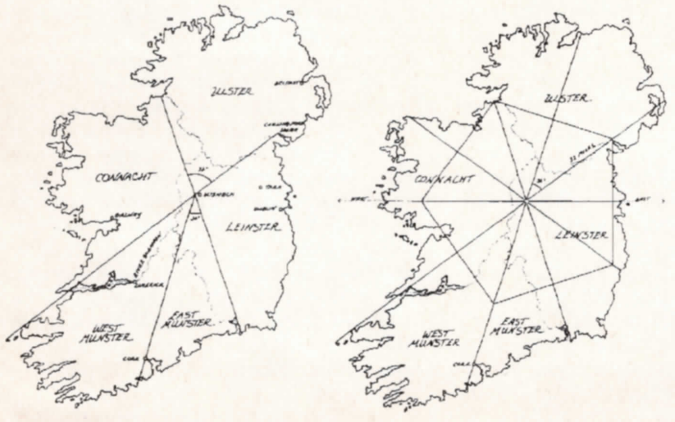
Once again John Michell steps forward, this time in company, to convince us that something peculiar was going on in ancient times: the proposal being that there was once an ideal social structure, often sought for and sometimes achieved, in which a nation would divide itself into 12 tribes, representing the signs of the zodiac and arranged in a wheel around a central holy mountain. At the same time, the landscape would be enchanted with geomancy, music and myth. The most notable examples of this idea are the ideal society proposed in Plato's *Laws*, and the 12 tribes of Israel; and the early chapters of the book collect a great deal of material, from Europe to Africa and Asia, to show that such societies either existed or were attempted. From this we move on to ancient "chorographies" – attempts to correlate all the nations of the known world and their geographical locations with the signs of the zodiac.

Within the geographical areas covered, I find the evidence assembled convincing enough and enormously interesting; but the suggestion that the proposed structure might be an archetypal symbol that is *universal*, seems rather contentious. Its use in China, implied by mention of a "Chinese zodiac", lacks proof; the Chinese 12-animal cycle has numerous applications (calendrical, directional, divinatory, etc), but it has no astrologically corresponding stellar constellations. The Chinese simply didn't use a solar zodiac, preferring a stellar wheel based upon the 28 constellations of the lunar mansions, and their chorographies are based on the same system. Similarly, the number 12 is of no great significance to the Chinese, whose numerical cosmologies are built more upon 5, 8 and 9. But this is a mere quibble on my part, and shouldn't detract from the other excellences of the book.

The authors seem on surer ground when the scale is less vast. Their material tracing an alignment of sites sacred to Apollo and St Michael, right across Europe, is stunning; even more so are the beautiful geomantic patterns revealed by the structure and sacred sites of Jerusalem.

All in all, this is a delightful book, which has to be highly recommended to anyone interested in ancient history, earth mysteries, symbolism, and so forth. But I do feel it's rather under-referenced, and when an author isn't being directly quoted one is occasionally left wondering where the material has come from. However, the work moves smoothly enough for the general reader; but for anyone seriously intrigued by the material and wanting to follow it up, a simple three-page bibliography isn't really enough.

Steve Moore



FAR LEFT: Lines drawn diagonally between the coastal boundary points of Ireland's four provinces meet to form angles of exactly 72 degrees. One of these angles is bisected by a line to the boundary mark between East and West Munster.

LEFT: The due east-west line through the centre of Ireland fits into the pentagonal scheme of sacred geometry, which is suggested by the lines in the previous diagram. This prior division of the country into ten sectors from the symbolic centre develops into the 12-part division shown in the following diagram.

leave huge spans of time and leaps of culture unaccounted for.

As Hough wanders about Britain speaking to pagans and Christians of all types, the often tenuous distinctions between the various schools of witchcraft, Satanism, Black Magic, and paganism become lost as each party stakes its claim to the true way and damns the others. A case in point is Chris Bray's counter-charge that members of the Christian clergy, and not pagans, have committed the largest number of documented cases of ritualised child abuse.

By far the most interesting chapters are those devoted to interviews with the MP Geoffrey Dickens, the Reverend Kevin Logan (both of whom are called here 'Witchfinders'), officers of the Reachout organisation, social workers, and a senior organiser of the Benel Satanists. They are questioned against the background of the 'Satanic' child abuse scares in Liverpool, Alfreton, Manchester, Salford, Nottingham and Rochdale which are chronicled but not in as much referenced detail as I would have liked. Given Hough's range of interests, there are the inevitable correlations with UFO abductions, poltergeist attacks, and encounters with demons.

Readers new to these subjects will be intrigued and entertained. Seasoned buffs will be disappointed by Hough's failure to challenge the more fantastic or unsupported claims of his informants.

Bob Rickard

THE UFO SILENCERS
edited by Timothy Green Buckley

Inner Light Publications, Box 753, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, USA. 1990, $12.95 (+ $1.50 p&p), pp160.

Stories of Men in Black (MIBs) bring to life, and justify, the paranoia and conspiracy theories that pepper UFO research. Encounters with MIBs are regarded as an essential part of the UFO riddle. They are even part of the popular concept of the subject: for example, the Stranglers rock group named one of their albums after them, and MIBs featured in a brilliant TV advertisement for Moosehead lager a couple of years back. The 1960s TV series *The Invaders* – currently replaying Sunday lunchtimes – portrayed them as aliens who can look like normal human beings, the better to suppress the evidence for their existence and that of UFOs.

Albert Bender, according to himself, was the first ufologist to encounter sinister MIBs. He thought he had the solution to the UFO mystery, but as soon as he began telling others about his discoveries, three MIBs visited his home. Their threats made him close down his International Flying Saucer Bureau in 1952. Since then, a number of witnesses and researchers have claimed they were similarly prevented from revealing what they know.

John Keel can be regarded as the most influential propagator of MIB mythology in recent years, and he contributes a short

Albert Bender's sketch of the MIB that visited him in 1952.

opening chapter to this book. Keel gives a good boost to any paranoid's most frightening thoughts when he asserts that MIBs can appear (and disappear) anywhere, and can pose as almost any kind of official. However, he says, they are not part of our reality.

As the MIBs make house calls, drive around in conspicuous black limousines, and use the public telephone system, you'd think they'd be easier to trace or capture than a bug-eyed monster darting about in a souped-up saucer – yet they prove to be as insubstantial as ghosts. The licence plates on their cars (if they are noted) are untraceable; witnesses never think of questioning or trying to apprehend them, and when someone, on a rare occasion, chases them, they simply vanish around a corner. Cameras fail in their presence – although this book does feature one photo of a MIB lurking in a doorway. MIBs tend to appear when a witness is alone and vulnerable, and they seem to read the thoughts of witnesses and know intimate details of their doings.

Very few books have been devoted entirely to the MIB phenomenon, and the opportunity has been taken here to pile in all the 'evidence' to present an overall picture of their operations. There is no deep analysis here, but the book provides a variety of contributions by well-known ufologists and several first-hand eyewitness accounts.

One woman gives a graphic account of her abduction by MIBs. They bundled her into a car and took her to a small underground room, where she was detained for a week. During this period they tried to make her confess that she attempted suicide and that she shouldn't take anymore interest in UFOs. Agreeing to their demands eventually, she was dumped in a vacant building. The strangest part of the story is the apparent indifference of the police when the woman and her mother went to report her kidnapping.

Another case demonstrates the ridiculous B-movie behaviour characteristic of many observed MIBs. The witness claims that MIBs ambushed him after he had been abducted by aliens and given a physical examination inside a UFO. While driving to Amarillo to take a lie-detector test, the man stopped to help a woman at the side of the road trying to fix a '55 Plymouth. Before he reached her, he was felled by a blow to the back of his head. Recovering, he saw two suited men standing over him. One, carrying an automatic rifle, told him: "If you pass this test, there's going to be a lot of daylight seen through you in more than one place." The man went on to fail the lie-detector test, but on returning home and recounting the threat to his wife, he says his house was sprayed with machine gun bullets from a passing car. Not for the first time we are left wondering why a witness didn't contact the police, or why, if the evidence was that tangible, didn't that investigation proceed.

The alleged powers of the MIBs to suppress any investigation of them seems quite at odds with their other characteristic of generally inept behaviour. They threaten but rarely inflict any material or physical damage. In more frightening cases – like the two mentioned – the stories have come out regardless. They seem as adept at concealing UFO evidence as the ufonauts are at suppressing the memories of abductees.

MIBs also provide an acceptable excuse for UFO witnesses or researchers to drop out of the subject. Some of it may well be the result of paranoia, pranksters or misperceptions; but in any city in the world you can see strange-looking people behaving weirdly. It is also possible that some MIBs might be 'real' government agents (especially in the USA). In the end there is little to go on but fear-tinged speculation!

As I was reading the chapter on 'The Mystery Helicopters', a noisy low-flying chopper buzzed my house. I'd better watch out ...

Nigel Watson

THE CIRCLEMAKERS
by Andrew Collins.

ABC Books, Leigh-on-sea. 1992, pb £4.95, pp349, photos, notes, bib, index.

Hunter Thompson once said: "When the going gets weird, the weird get going." Well, they don't come much weirder these days than the wonderful and frightening world of crop circles. Author Andy Collins has leapt into the morass with this contribution to the increasingly crowded genre of cornography. Commendably, he avoids the all too familiar and depressing factionalism rife among the circles followers and makes a brave attempt to scythe through the stacks of claims and counter claims, seeking out the roots of the phenomenon with his patent brand of swashbuckling mysticism, 'Psychic Questing'.

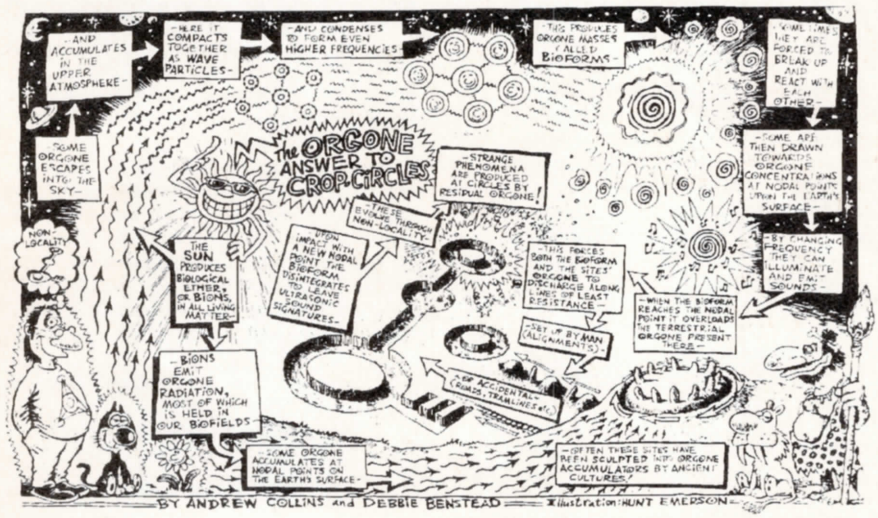
Starting with a mysteriously polting book, circle visits and meditations on photocopied pictograms, Collins and his side-

kick Debbie, and their pals, find their own answer to the meaning of the circles. A combination of research and psychic revelation leads them to orgone - the mysterious life-energy discovered by Wilhelm Reich - and they discover the true use of stone circles on the way. They take the existence of orgone for granted, and providing the reader can also, everything else more or less follows, providing an unconventional, but well argued, explanation of circles structures and associated phenomena, invoking orgone theory and the semi-intelligent energy-form UFO-like 'sky creatures' postulated by Trevor James Constable. Collins also achieves the almost impossible task of proving both the 'plasma vortex' and UFO theories of circle formation at the same time, but neither in a way their protagonists will approve of.

The chief failing here is in Collins' approach to science; it is rejected when it doesn't agree with him and endorsed enthusiastically when he can reap the benefits, and generally grazed over for evocative terms and concepts to nail over gaps in the general argument like plywood over riot damage. Particularly abused is particle physics (always a source of impressive meaninglessness) from which Collins harvests the notion of 'non-locality' used to support his ideas with a "no reason to suggest..." and an "if you apply such logic to...", and which remains immovably welded to it for the rest of the book. He also throws in some spectacularly unwarranted assumption about orgone and the long-sought 'fifth force' of physics, and plays fast and loose with field theory. While I understand Collins' whole thrust is based on intuition and insight, such borrowings, unsupported by a shred of proof, do him no favours and weaken his arguments, symptomatic as they are of enthusiastically extending a theory beyond its natural limits. The book would have worked well without them.

Anyone seeking a rattling good psychic questing adventure yarn - like Collins' best known *The Black Alchemist* - are in for disappointment here, as this is a far more theoretical work. If you are looking for a fresh overview of the crop circle phenomenon, avoiding the mud-slinging and established theories, and can stomach Collins' reliance on unsupported psychic insight, you could do worse than cast an eye over this fat book. For me, though, I hope that with his next book, Andy Collins returns to the territory of his previous successes, where his real strengths lie.

Ian Simmons



VIDEO VIEW

THE LOCH NESS MONSTER STORY

With breathtaking views of Britain's largest and deepest body of water, this history of the Nessie phenomenon and the personalities who pursue her is balanced and informative. Scripted by the proprietors of the Official Loch Ness Exhibition, in Drumnadrochit, it actually deals quite fairly with the serious research (like Operation Deepscan), the hoaxes (like Frank Searle's photos) and the controversies (such as the retouching of Robert Rines' underwater photos).

There are interviews with at least eight witnesses; Adrian Shine (head of the surveys of Lochs Ness and Morar), Tim Dinsdale and other researchers; a review of various theories of Nessie's identity, origin and survival; and many valuable archival newsreel clips - in other words, something for everyone. Apart from the annoying permanent presence of a frame counter in the bottom left corner, and no mention of Doc Shiels' photos (despite featuring one on the cover), this is probably the best documentary on Nessie that we've yet seen.

The Loch Ness Monster; 1991; 57 mins; £10.99 from major stores (+ £1.75 p&p from Video Offer, Box 936, South Woodham Ferres, Essex CM3 5VL – or phone 0245 322499). Polygram CFV12212. **Bob Rickard**

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DEAR FT...

THE CAR FROM HELL

■ After reading The Haunted Car *[FT61:50]*, I would like to tell you about my 'haunted' car, registration 666. The number plate didn't bother me when I first bought the car, as I had no belief in this sort of thing. Then small items in the car started to vanish – maps, sunglasses, packets of sweets – at first I thought it was my wife tidying things up, but this was not the case. The lights would come on for no reason, or the horn was start sounding off. No electrical fault was found.

The car was stolen and used in a Post Office robbery and it came back in better condition. There have also been five attempts to break into it, all unsuccessful. Within a week, my mother and father-in-law died and a year later my brother also.

My wife began suggesting it was about time for the car to go, but each time she mentioned the idea the car broke down. To top it all, a strange sweet smell has started to appear every now and then. Last week, while driving home from work, I had a strange feeling that there was someone sitting in the back, but I couldn't see anything in the rear view mirror.

After all the bad luck we've had, I'm now a believer in all this sort of thing. So, any buyers please? *[If anyone wants to buy the devil on wheels, FT can provide Mr Page's address - Eds.]*

Chris Page
Keighley, West Yorks

ALIEN POST BOX?

■ The idea that crop circles are messages from some other intelligence (aliens, Gaia etc) is fairly common, but has anyone thought that the messages, if messages they be, are not actually for us? The idea of Planet Earth as a sort of galactic 'post it' note may be disconcerting to the geocentrists, but it is surely worth considering.

C.P. Dean
Redbridge, Essex

TAKEN TO TASK

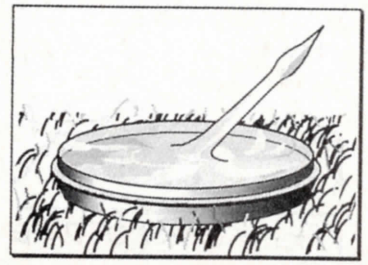
■ I must take Mr Rickard to task over his mention of the 'fictitious' Philadelphia Experiment. As far as I am aware, the truth of this incident has never been conclusively proved either way. I suggest that he refrain from making such sweeping statements.

Cain
Sussex

SPOOKY SPIKE #1

■ In regard to the item about a spiky protrusion on an iced-over bird bath *[FT62:10]*, the following may be of interest.

I have noticed for many years that ice cubes made in a refrigerator often have small bumps in the centre of the top. This puzzled me, as I thought they should be absolutely flat. Then I began buying bottled, distilled water, and when I filled the ice tray with distilled water, I got larger bumps in the middle. One day, I opened the fridge and there were ice cubes with bumps half an inch high, and one an inch high – a spike! I had to address this; I couldn't have ice cubes blowing holes in my world view. Obviously, the vibration of the compressor motor sets up a standing wave in the water, which ices over in that form. This could explain a bump, but not a spike. The spike, I think, is formed from the *sound* waves of the motor, possibly an ELF harmonic component that is reinforced by the mechanical vibration. This is why I always get bumps (the vibration is always there) but only rarely spikes (the particular placement of the tray in its chamber reinforcing or negating harmonic ELF).



So a bird bath would have wind causing a standing wave rather than a mechanical vibration, and the same wind generating a sound wave over the edge of the bird bath. What I'm impressed with here is that the water in the bird bath would be so pure.

Someone has recently invented a refrigeration unit that operates on sound. A test unit went up in the last shuttle launch. An extremely loud A440 is produced at one end of a long tube, and the other end gets very hot. The sound is muffled from the outside, so the entire unit is actually quieter than standard models.

Our civilization is still very primitive in using the inherent properties of sound and light to their fullest.

Kurt Lothmann
Houston, Texas

SPOOKY SPIKE #2

■ I was interested to see the 'spooky spike' item *[FT62:10]*. We discovered a similar formation in water on 21 December 1990 in a foil container (for takeaway food) put out on a stone wall for the birds. Again, the weather had been mild every day that week, so the water froze during the one night only. Our 'spike' is three centimetres high, triangular in section, sharply formed, and hollow. The nearest tree was four metres away. We still have the spike in the freezer; it would be nice to find an explanation before disposing of it.

Mrs O. Grant
Watford, Herts.

THE FIRES OF BINBROOK

■ Around May 1990, my father decided to visit the grave of his brother who died during World War II and was buried in Binbrook in Lincolnshire. This was the first time he had visited the grave since the burial 47 years before.

As he arrived, he saw smoke in the distance, and when he was in the churchyard, he heard fire engines passing, sounding their alarms. That evening, he heard that the RAF station at Binbrook had closed down and the aerodrome was being used to make a film about the American flying forces in World War II called 'The Memphis Belle', directed by David Putnam. During the filming, a plane had been taking off when it crashed at the end of the runway, bursting into flames. All the crew escaped without injury.

The accident mirrored exactly the one that killed my uncle. The difference was that his plane was loaded with ammunition ready for a mission in Germany and the ensuing fire caused a massive explosion that claimed the lives of all the crew. My father arrived home at Bath to find an article about the film in his local paper. David Putnam lived in Chippenham nearby.

What prompted me to write to you was the discovery in your book *Diary of a Mad Planet* of the 'Binbrook Triangle' *[FT24:8]* from Larry Arnold's article on 'fire leynes', and my wonder at the propensity for fiery events in this region. [Editors' note: see also Fort's account of a fiery Binbrook poltergeist in *Lo!*, chapter 14.]

Catherine Walker
Monmouth, Gwent

ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY

■ With reference to the puzzling watch winder found embedded in an ancient Indian coin *[FT65:46]*, I draw your attention to these bizarre representations, taken from Ernst Lehner's *Symbols, Signs and Signets* (Dover 1950). The Assyrian eagle-headed god Nisroch and the Babylonian winged guard of the symbolic tree not only carry very nice handbags, but are also wearing wristwatches! Also Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom and learning, is depicted with a mobile phone, or is it a transistor radio?

Could it be that the ancient gods of the Middle East were privy to some high tech knowledge that has only recently been rediscovered? I would be interested to hear of further evidence apart from the familiar von Daniken 'ancient astronaut' stuff.

Caroline Menis
Sheffield

WRISTWATCH INVENTION

■ I must add a note of caution to your feature, *Ancient Indian Wristwatch Wind-up? [FT65:46]*. Although wristwatches are known from the eighteenth century, they were, and remained, extremely rare until the coming of the motor car: a horseman can take out and consult a pocket-watch; a car driver cannot. World War I provided another enormous boost to the popularity of the wristwatch: it was found that diving to the ground to escape shell-fire usually resulted in the breaking of a pocket-watch. Wristwatches remained intact. Strangely enough, the Americans retained their pocket watches.

Some of the earliest wristwatches were made by soldering lugs to women's pocket-watches so that a strap could be attached. One company even made a sort of cage which strapped onto the wrist, into which a small pocket-watch could be fastened. In any case, any wristwatch dating to the period of the Indian Mutiny would not have had a winder – it would have been key-wound.

J. Raybould
Stourbridge, West Midlands

PARROT CHICKEN MINDER

■ The letter from Richard Holland about Mrs Ashe's parrot 'Polly' in the 1830s *[FT59:64]* reminded me of a story related in John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690; Bk II Ch XXVII Section 8), taken in turn from Sir William Temple's *Memoires of what past in Christendom from 1672 to 1679.*

Prince Maurice (of where is not stated), during a visit to Brazil, was curious to meet a parrot of some renown in the area. "When [the parrot] came first into the room where the Prince was, with a great many *Dutch-men* about him, it said presently, *What a company of white men are here?* They asked it what he thought that Man was, pointing at the Prince? It answered, *Some General or other;* when they brought it close to him, he asked it, *Whence come ye?* It answered, *From* Marinnan. The Prince, *To whom do you belong?* The Parrot, *To a Portugeze* [sic]. Prince, *What do you there?* Parrot, *I look after the Chickens.* The Prince laughed and said, *You look after the Chickens?* The Parrot answered, *Yes I, and I know well enough how to do it;* and made the Chuck four or five times that People used to make to Chickens when they call them."

Mrs Ashe's parrot was reputedly from Brazil and conversed with Portuguese sailors; the unnamed chicken guard also spoke to the Prince in 'Brasilian'. Perhaps they are in some way related? I think we should be told. By a parrot. [For further parrot items see ***FT54:29, FT56:9, FT59:9*** etc.]

Karl Rowley
Staffordshire

SEISMIC CORRECTIONS

■ I was interested to see that Peter Haining's book on the 1884 Colchester earthquake has been reissued yet again *[FT64:59]*. Subsequent research has shown the book to be exaggerated and unreliable. "Largest earthquake to hit England in recorded history" is a complete myth; there are many larger ones, including that of 2 April 1990 in Shropshire. "Most damaging in the last 400 years" is more accurate. As for being hushed up, there is evidence for the reverse – I enclose a copy of my paper demonstrating some remarkable forging of photographic evidence. Even in 1884, the camera lies. There is no Colchester Cathedral. Your picture on page 60 shows Lion Walk Congregational Church. Ironically, this spire is the only Victorian structure still standing in Lion Walk today!

■ Regarding your feature on seiche waves *[FT64:39]*, I would rule out an undersea seismic disturbance for a jet of water 500 feet high. Undersea seismic disturbances typically produce very long period waves which are almost undetectable until they reach shallow water and begin to 'pile up' into tsunamis or 'tidal waves'.

Roger Musson
British Geological Survey, Edinburgh

SNAKE-EATING BIRDS

■ Roger Musson's suggestion that snake-eating birds in Mexican symbology denotes a link with African cultures is probably not valid *[FT64:63]*. Though the secretary bird is a true snake-eating bird, others, ranging from hornbills, kookaburras, owls and eagles, regularly eat snakes. There is even a whole group of Old World eagles called snake-eating eagles. Snake-eating birds of one kind or another exist in the Americas. There is the symbolic aspect, analogous to St George and the dragon: snakes are, unfortunately, a symbol of evil. Maybe it's relevant that the Mexican god Quetzelcoatl is portrayed as half bird, half snake.

Darren Naish
Southampton

FATHER CHRISTMAS WRITES ...

■ The garments worn by Father Xmas are based upon the Fly Agaric mushroom, which used judiciously, on tongue and temple by shamans in Lapland, enable those wise, altruistic men to go on out-of-body-journeys so that they can bring back *gifts* of healing! These red and white growths can exchange hands for as many as five reindeer I'm told, and even the urine of those wealthy Lapps who 'party' on them gives pleasure to those poor Lapps who are wont to drink it.

Having been a subordinate Claus for many a year, here in Eastbourne, I have a particular interest in the jocund, rubicund, rotund and fecund figure of friendliness and frolicsome festivity, who flies down from the North Pole with gifts for the children, just as our intraterrestrial ancestors probably did from Ultima Thule all those aeons ago – giving us the honey bee and corn!

Anthony Chamberlaine-Brothers
Eastbourne

SHC AND ETHER

■ It is possible that some 19th century cases of spontaneous human combustion may be related to ether drinking. Although superseded now by other drugs, ether drinking was once very widespread, especially in Ulster. In 1891, the Select Committee on British and Foreign Spirits estimated that there were 50,000 regular 'etheromaniacs' in Ulster, one in eight of the population. Seemingly, ether was everywhere in Ulster at the time. A local doctor is reported as saying: "The atmosphere of Cookstown and Moneymore was loaded with ether" and *The Times* in 1871 stated that market days smelt not of pigs, tobacco smoke or unwashed human beings, but of ether.

Ether is difficult to drink because it volatilizes at body temperature, but the etheromaniacs had a ritual that overcame the problems. The drinker would rinse out his or her mouth with cold water, hold the nose, and swallow the ether quickly, followed by more cold water. Regular etheromaniacs could consume up to a pint a day in this way. If the drinker failed to 'rift' (belch) at the appropriate moment, explosive volatilization could cause a heart attack. More apposite to SHC, there are cases of people rifting close to naked flames, and having fire travelling down their throats. According to McGuffin, drinkers were sometimes brought to Cookstown workhouse almost burnt to death by ether. In 1891, an ether explosion in a shop at Draperstown killed four people.

Until it was banned, ether was on open sale, either in liquid form or as a sort of wine gum. In 1890, ether was listed under the Poisons Act and in 1927, it was stamped out (as a popular tipple) by the Intoxicating Liquor and Licensing Act. So the spread of time during which ether fires are possible is 1850-1927. Most probably, the biochemistry of the fat metabolism of regular ether drinkers is little investigated. At least it may be worth looking closer at SHC cases from the last century for signs of etheromania. Perhaps some victims were burnt into ethernity. [References: Ken Connell: *Irish Peasant Society* Belfast 1968; John McGuffin: *In Praise of Poteen* Belfast 1978.]

Nigel Pennick
Cambridge

VAMPIRES AND THE CIA

■ Your piece on the Manila Vampire *[**FT64:11**]* reminded me of something I found while researching the intelligence community's involvement with Forteana. In that case, stories of another Filipino vampire – the *Asuang* – were circulated by the media during the early 1950s.

Colonel Edward Lansdale, psywar expert with the CIA, studied peasant lore, taboos and myths and used them against the communist insurgents (Huks). Some of the more imaginative measures were broadcasting messages from a cloud-covered airplane and putting curses on villagers who helped the Huks. The CIA worked through the Filipino Civil Affairs Office to spread rumours of *Asuangs* in the hills near the Huk headquarters.

To add credibility to the vampire story, Lansdale covertly arranged for the assassination of a Huk and to have him drained of blood and two large puncture wounds put on his neck. The soldier was left at a crossroads near heavy troop movements. The Huks – frightened of vampires - quickly abandoned the area. I cannot help wondering if the recent *Manananggal* scare is not somehow connected with manipulation of the populace during the Philippine elections; or as part of that overused excuse –'protecting American interests'.

Ron Schaffner
Milford, Ohio

H.P. LOVECRAFT AS PROPHET

■ Until now I was highly amused to hear of certain occultists who look on the American pulp horror/sf writer H.P. Lovecraft as a sort of prophet. I'm quite a fan and always thought, having read his biography, that he was an erudite and sceptical man. However, consider the following quotations from Lovecraft's *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs* (1924) in relation to "Crocodile Boy" *[**FT64:19**]* and "Riddles of the Sphinx" *[**FT64:44:42**]* as 'evidence' for his occult status.

"At all stages of history the sacred animals were mummified, so that consecrated bulls, cats, ibises, crocodiles and the like might return some day to greater glory. But only in the decadence did they mix the human and the animal in the same mummy… What happened to those composite mummies is not told of – at least publicly – and it is certain that no Egyptologist ever found one."

"Near the edge of the plateau and due east of the Second Pyramid, with a face probably altered to form a colossal portrait of Khephren, its royal restorer, stands the monstrous Sphinx … There are unpleasant tales of the Sphinx before Khephren - but whatever its elder features were, the monarch replaced them with his own that men might look at the colossus without fear."

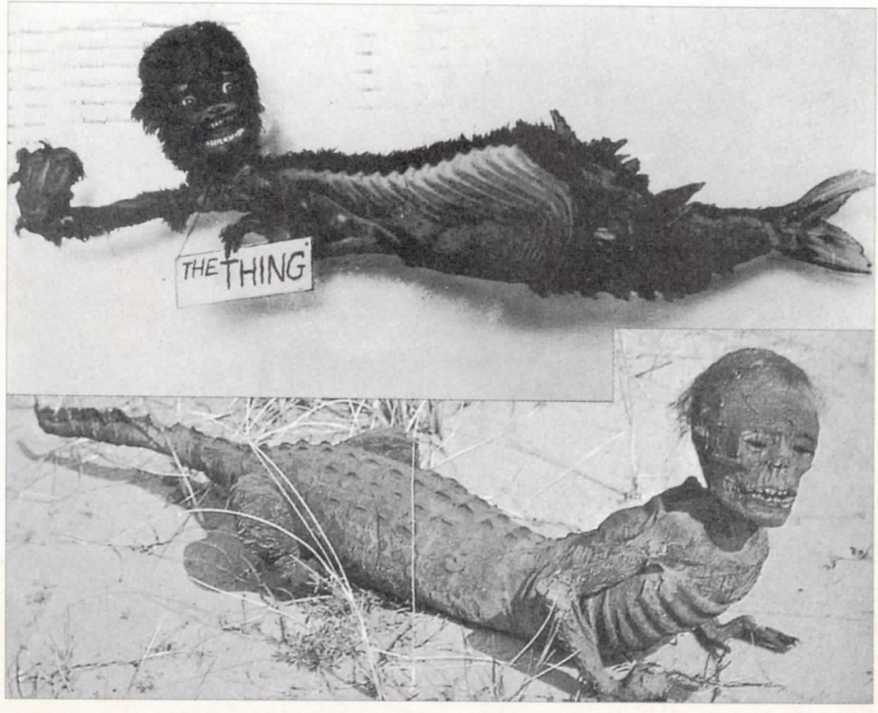
M.C Kilburn
Bradford

FAIRGROUND NONDESCRIPTS

■ Your story of the crocodile boy mummy *[**FT64:19**]* reminds me of the 'alligator men' that used to be exhibited at Carnivals and can still be found at highway tourist traps around the USA. Here is a photo of 'Jake the Alligatorman' from Marsh's Free Museum in Long Beach (bottom).

Jim Riecken
Sparkhill, NY

■ For comparison, here's an exhibit from 'Ye Olde Curiosity Shop' in Alaskan Way, Seattle (below), sent to us by Georgina Clark-Mazo – *The Editors*



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● **SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH** – Lecture. 10 Dec: The dying brain: science and the near-death experience (Susan Blackmore). Venue: the Lecture Hall of Kensington Central Library, Campden Hill Road, London W8, at 6:30pm. Non-members £3, student cards £1. Further information from the SPR at 49 Marloes Rd, Kensington, London W8 6LA. Tel: 071 937 8984.

● **BUFORA** – British UFO Research Association. Lectures at London Business School, Sussex Place, Outer Circle, Regents Park, London NW1 at 6:30pm. £1.50 (members), £3.00 (visitors). 5 Dec – 'UFOs in Art' (illustrated) (Michael Buhler). Ring: 0582 763218 for more details.

● **LONDON EARTH MYSTERIES CIRCLE** – Evening meetings in St Andrew's Seminar Room, Maria Assumpta Centre, 23 Kensington Square, London W8, at 7pm on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays in each month. Members £1.00, non-members £2.00, unwaged £1.50. Lectures: 13 Oct (Reclaiming our Heritage), 27 Oct (Earth Mysteries and Magnetism), 10 Nov (social eve.), 24 Nov (UFOs & Psychic phenomena). Contact: Rob Stephenson, 18 Christchurch Ave, London NW6 7QN, or tel: 081 459 0652.

● **TIBET FORUM** – free lectures every first Tuesday of each month at Institute Hall, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Ave, London WC2 at 6:30pm. 2 Dec – 'United Nations and the Quest for Human Rights' (Dr Norman Goodman M.P.).

● **THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY** – events on 6 Dec: at 11:15am, 'Holy Blood and The Holy Grail'; at 6pm 'Megalithic Science' - 50 Gloucester Place, London W1H 3HJ. Tel: 071 935 9261.

● **DEAD HAPPY** – Many of us die and become ghosts by thinking we are still alive, Lance Trendall has written a book on ghosts called *Dead Happy* and is visiting ancient battlefields to lay ghosts to rest. *Dead Happy* explains what it is like to be a ghost, how to prevent hauntings, how to help ghosts and how to ensure you don't become a ghost when you die. Available from the author (ISBN 0 9520472 0 9). Talks planned for December in Lincoln and York. For details and to order signed copies of *Dead Happy* phone 0582 461581.

RESEARCH

● **FORTEAN CURIOS –** Fortean Times is collecting information on private and museum collections of bizarre and mysterious objects such as unicorn horns, vegetable lambs, bits of alien craft, fafrotskies, rat-kings, fairy artifacts, mummified cats etc. If you know of any please write to FT at the editorial address.

● **NDE? OOBE?** – Graham Williams *Astral Project* Magazine, 8 Larch Croft, Tividale, Warley, E Midlands B69 2JB, would like to hear from you.

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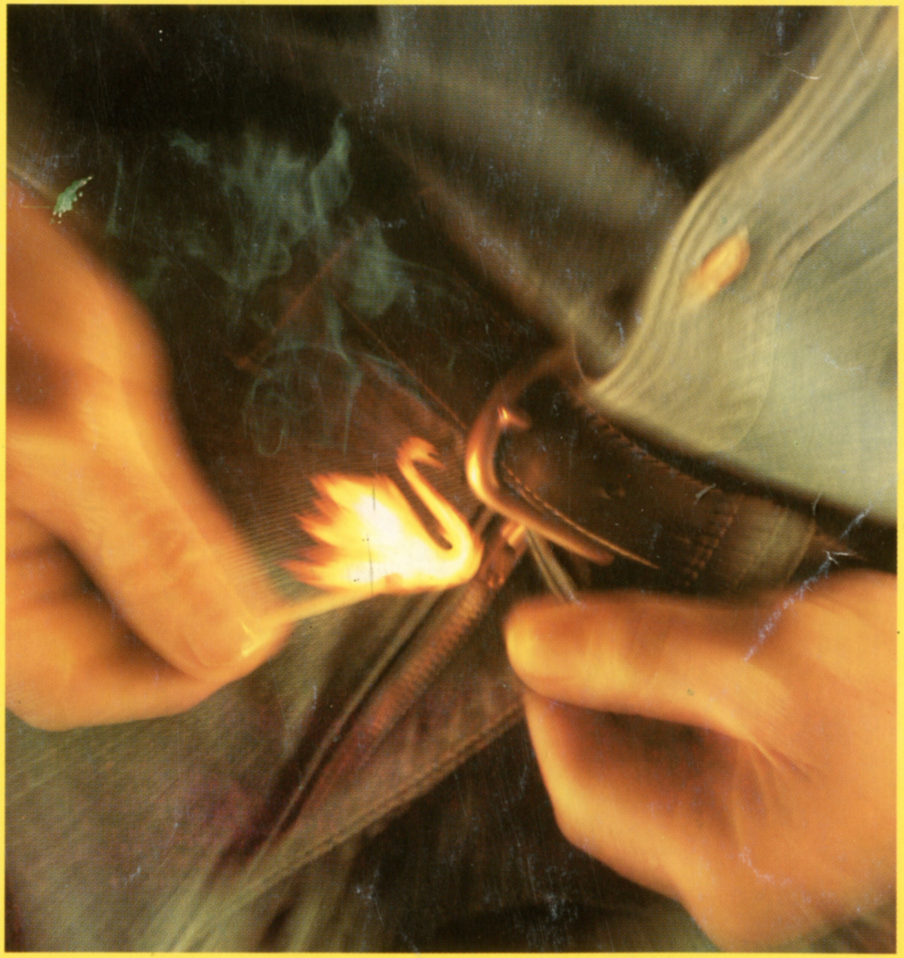

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